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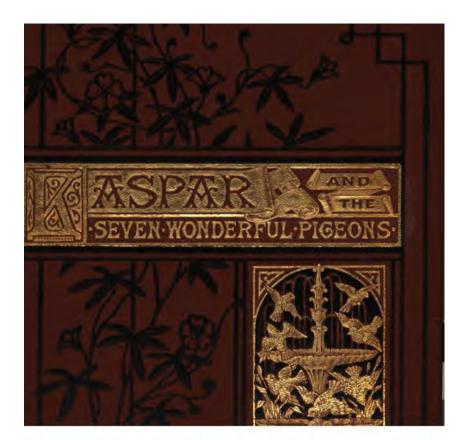
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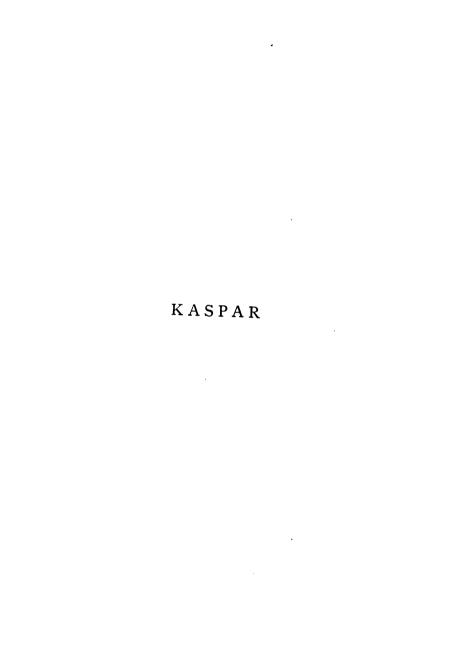
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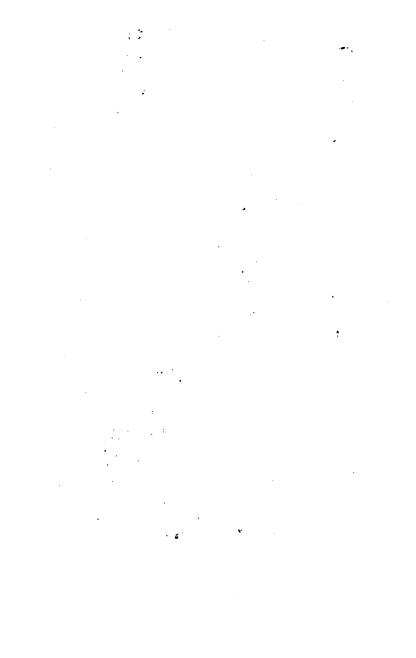


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KASPAR RELATES HIS DREAM.





# KASPAR

AND THE

# SEVEN WONDERFUL PIGEONS OF WÜRZBURG

JULIA GODDARD



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# KASPAR AND THE SEVEN PIGEONS.

#### CHAPTER I.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE.



HERE was never such a Christmas tree in the world—certainly not in any house in the old town in which Kaspar lived. So Kaspar thought.

And Kaspar was not alone in his opinion, for Thekla,

Marie, Linda, and little Fritz agreed with him; and if four persons thought that he was right, Kaspar did not see how he could well be wrong. At least that was how he argued.

The night before Christmas-eve Kaspar had dreamed that the Christ-child appeared

to him, and told him that this Christmas he should have the most beautiful tree that he had ever seen.

He was quite sure that it was the Christchild, because he was exactly like the porcelain figure that stood upon his mother's inlaid cabinet. Yes, the Christ-child wore the same pale blue robe, spotted over with golden stars; and in his arms He bore a golden cross almost as large as Himself; and a glorious halo surrounded His head, that lighted up His meek eyes, and shone upon His fair flowing hair.

Kaspar knew Him in a moment, and he involuntarily clasped his hands and repeated the little prayer that he had been taught to say—

"Christ-child, make me good to be, That I in heaven may dwell with Thee."

Then the Christ-child smiled so sweetly that Kaspar was emboldened to tell Him all his hopes and fears; and he woke up just as the Christ-child had promised him the loveliest tree that he could imagine.

Kaspar was eight years old, and when he told his dream to Thekla and Marie, who were ten and twelve, they laughed at him, and said that when he came to be as old as they were he would know better than to believe in dreams.

"Then I would rather be only eight," answered Kaspar sturdily, "for it was a good dream, and I intend always to believe in what is good."

He did not speak of his dream again to Thekla and Marie, but he found willing listeners in Linda and little Fritz, who quite looked up to Kaspar, and regarded him as a great authority.

"Had the Christ-child snow-white wings, as soft as swan's down?" asked Linda, eagerly.

"No," replied Kaspar; "He had no wings at all."

Linda looked puzzled; then she said, "If He had no wings, how could He fly down from heaven. Are you quite sure, Kaspar, that it was really the Christ-child?"

This difficulty had never occurred to Kaspar; he too looked puzzled for a moment, but at length his face brightened.

"There are no wings to mamma's Christchild."

"No; but mamma's Christ-child is made of

porcelain, and does not want to fly," returned Linda.

"But if the real Christ-child had had wings, then mamma's Christ-child would have wings also," answered Kaspar, thoughtfully; "mamma would not buy anything that was not true."

"I suppose not," said Linda; but she hesitated, as though she were not altogether satisfied.

"Did He say I should have a large woolly lamb, with a little bell and a red ribbon round its neck?" asked Fritz, who had hitherto not spoken, but had opened his eyes wide, and stared first at Kaspar and then at Linda.

"No," replied Kaspar; "He only said it should be the most beautiful tree we had ever seen, for I awoke before He had time to tell me anything else."

"That was a pity, because if He had only told you what He should give us, we should know whether you had really seen the Christchild."

"What nonsense you children are talking!" said Thekla.

"Kaspar is always dreaming about something or other," laughed Marie; "it is a pity he cannot learn the multiplication table in his dreams, then there might be some use in them."

Kaspar blushed, for, although he was eight years old, he could get no farther than four times, and most people said he was backward. Marie thought him quite a dunce, for she could say up to twelve times perfectly when she was only seven.

But Linda had a higher opinion of Kaspar than she had of either Thekla or Marie, for he could tell her the most charming stories, which they could not; and so she had a firm conviction that he must be much cleverer than they were, in spite of the multiplication table.

"Never mind, Kaspar," she whispered; "we shall know this evening, when we see the tree."

Linda, Kaspar, and Fritz thought that evening would never come, and Kaspar observed that he believed Christmas-eve to be the longest day in the year.

"Oh, when will you learn anything, Kaspar," said the matter-of-fact Marie, looking up from her crochet-work; "the twenty-first of June is the longest day, and the twenty-first of

December is the shortest day, so that Christmas-eve is not very far from the shortest day in the year."

"I did not mean in that way," returned Kaspar; "I was thinking of something else."

"I know what Kaspar means," said Linda, taking up Kaspar's defence; "and if you will be so particular, Marie, every day is twenty-four hours long, and there never was a day longer or shorter than that, so that it is not really quite true to say that one day is longer than another."

Linda had made quite a long speech for a girl of seven; but then it was in defence of Kaspar, of whom she was the firm ally, and Kaspar was too often in the clouds to defend himself.

Marie did not deign to answer her argument, but merely said—

"When you are older you will be wiser;" which Linda felt was no answer at all.

Kaspar tried to be patient, and to amuse himself and Linda until evening should come; but he could think of nothing but his dream, and it seemed to him as if he heard a voice whispering in his ear—

"Christmas tree-Christmas tree."

"Tell us a story, Kaspar, and that will make the time pass quickly."

Kaspar shook his head. He could think of nothing but his dream.

Linda looked disappointed.

Suddenly Kaspar jumped up and took down a book from the shelf.

"I will read something to you, Linda." And he turned to Rückert's poem, "The Strangerchild's Holy Christ," and began to read—

> "A child of foreign air, On Christmas-eve benighted, Throughout a city fair, To see the lights all lighted, Ran swiftly here and there.

"He paused at every door, The cheerful rooms beholding; The light on every floor A lamplit tree unfolding; His heart was grieving sore.

"The sight sad tears hath won:
'Ah! each child hath its treasure,
A tree, a lighted one,
Wherein he takes his pleasure;
But I, alas! have none.

"' When in my home my hand By loving ones was taken, A tree for me did stand. But here I am forsaken In this strange foreign land.

"'Has not one of them all
Room for the little mourner?
In all these houses tall
Is there no tiny corner,
Though it were aye so small?

"'Will no one let me in?

I for no gift am suing;
But slender joy to win,
To feast my eyes with viewing
The Christmas gifts within.'

"He knocks at door and gate, At window and at shutter; No voice, ah! cruel fate, Doth friendly welcome utter, No ear on him doth wait.

"Each father's heart alone
His children's joy upstirreth,
Her gifts among her own
The mother fondly shareth;
None heed the child's faint tone.

"'I have no friend but Thee, No father and no mother; Oh, Christ! my guardian be, On earth I have none other; All have forgotten me.'

"His hands are stiff; he tries
To chafe the frost-nipped fingers;
He shivers, and he sighs,
And in the by-street lingers,
And turns to heaven his eyes.

"There comes adown the street, With white robes round him clinging, A child, the mourning child to meet, A lighted taper bringing; His voice sounds strangely sweet.

"'The holy Christ am I,
Once on this earth abiding;
Though all forget thee, I
(Child in my love confiding)
Will never pass thee by.

"'On all alike I call,

To those in streets who wander;

Their claim doth equal fall

With those in gay rooms yonder;

My aid is given to all.

"'Child, on this spot shall shine
Thy tree with glorious shimmer,
Caused by my power divine.
Yon others shall wax dimmer,
Paled in the light of thine.'

"Then did the Christ-child raise On high His hand to heaven; A tree with branching sprays Unto the child is given, With golden stars a-blaze.

"Far, and yet nigh it seemed, With tapers brightly blazing, The child, as though he dreamed, With heart grown still, stood gazing As there it radiant beamed.

"Lo! many an angel face Smiled from the tree down bending, And him with tender grace, Their loving aid extending, Drew to the shining space.

"Now in a home so fair,
With his dear Christ in heaven,
The child is free from care.
How we on earth have striven
Is soon forgotten there."

Linda had often heard the story before, but she listened as attentively as though she were listening for the first time. Perhaps more so, for there was something that chimed in with her feelings, especially to-day.

Little Fritz had drawn near, but he did not quite understand it; he was thinking more of

the large white lamb with the woolly fleece. He had seen one in a shop-window a few days before, and had been wishing that the Christ-child would send him one on Christmaseve.

"And thou, Gibby," said he, turning to the little dog that had nestled up to him; "dost thou expect a present? Thy paletot is old; perhaps thou wilt have a new one, bound with scarlet, to go out in when the weather is cold, thou art so tender. But thou dost not want playthings; thou wouldst not care for a lamb, or a Noah's ark, or a box of plates and cups and spoons."

Gibby was a tiny black and tan terrier; his skin was as smooth as velvet, and he had sharp bright eyes, and was a most wise and knowing little dog; and when he went out in the snow he wore a sort of jacket to keep him warm, which the children called his paletot.

"But Gibby cares for bonbons and cakes. Perhaps there will be a chocolate mouse for him," suggested Linda.

"A chocolate mouse!" repeated Marie; "what nonsense! And what are you two crying about?" she added, suddenly looking

at Kaspar and Linda, down whose cheeks large tears were rolling.

"The tears will come into my eyes when I read the Stranger-child," said Kaspar, apologetically; "it is so sorrowful."

"Then I advise you not to read it, certainly not on Christmas-eve. Your eyes will be red, and your faces are all smeared with rubbing the tears away. I never saw such children. I do wish you would be good."

"They are good enough, Fraulein Marie, if you would not tease them," interrupted Dorette, the sturdy serving-maiden. "Just leave them alone; I'll wash their faces, and they'll be all right when the bell rings for them to go in to see the tree."

"Is it not almost time?" asked Linda. "Dress us now, Dorette, so that we may be quite, quite ready."

Then Dorette washed the tears away, and put on Linda's new white frock and sash of the most lovely blue ribbon. Then came Kaspar's turn, and in his mulberry-coloured tunic and broad lace collar he looked like one of Vandyke's pictures, with his dark hair and thoughtful eyes. And as for little Fritz, when

Dorette had arranged his shining ringlets, she kissed him, and said he looked like an angel.

"But angels do not wear red shoes," said Marie.

"I don't care what angels wear, and what they don't; and I don't suppose you can tell me, Fraülein," retorted Dorette; "but I wish we were all as likely to be angels as little Fritz."

Here Thekla looked up from her embroidery, and told Marie it was time for them to change their dresses. So they went away, and the little ones sat quite still, waiting for the bell. At last it rang.

Tinkle, tinkle! No bell ever had the same sound.

The children sprang up.

Dorette opened the door, and in another moment they were in the drawing-room.

At first they could scarcely see at all, they were so dazzled by the brilliant blaze of light that came from the tree. But when their eyes had become in some degree accustomed to it, Linda turned to Kaspar and nodded vehemently.

"It is all true," she said, in a low tone.

"Yes," answered Kaspar, dreamily; "there never was such a tree!"

It was a strong young fir, and on its summit stood an angel with sparkling wings. Below the angel's feet was a wreath of large white lilies, with long golden stamens, and the tree was one blaze of tapers, whilst amongst the branches bloomed pink and white and crimson roses; and shining balls and drops of steel and coloured tinsel were hung about it; cherries like rubies and golden stars flashed here and there. It was one glitter of beauty. At its foot was a square enclosure of soft green moss with mimic trees, and there one might see the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. It was lovely. Even Marie could find no fault with it.

In front of the tree, and as if rising from a bed of lilies, stood the porcelain Christ-child, with its soft blue robe and large golden cross.

"You see his dream was true," said Linda, triumphantly; "it is the most beautiful tree that ever was seen."

And the presents!

There was the woolly lamb, with the red

ribbon round its neck. There was a Noah's ark; there were boxes of leaden soldiers, carved wooden animals in abundance, and picture-books, not omitting the history of Reynard the Fox; also dolls and waxen babies in waxen cradles, and painted waxen candles and tapers from Nuremberg, and cakes all gilt and covered with painted comfits, and marchpane and bonbons.

Kaspar, Linda, and little Fritz could do nothing but utter exclamations of delight as each fresh treasure was discovered.

And Thekla and Marie were equally well employed; the servants too. There was something for everyone; no one was forgotten. Gibby's paletot was lying in state by the side of Gibby's new collar and silver bell. And, better still, there was a folded paper, with Gibby's name written upon it, placed on a footstool in front of the table.

Gibby found it at once, and how he snuffed round it, and tried to open the packet with his nose and his tiny paws! For it contained what Gibby liked better than anything else, and what he had once been punished for stealing—a piece of sausage!

So Linda helped him, and now he might eat away in content, for it was Christmas-eve.

Suddenly a flush came over Kaspar's face; he opened the window and listened.

Yes, there were footsteps coming that way.

Then he whispered to his mother. And a smile came over the mother's face as she said—

"Yes, my son."

He gathered together a heap of his cakes and apples and nuts.

"And I too," said Linda, giving some of her bonbons.

"And I," said little Fritz, placing a large apple in Kaspar's hands.

Then Kaspar went to the window, and cried out as loud as he could—

"The Christ-child comes! The Christ-child comes!"

And his voice rang out clear into the frosty air, and at its sound the pattering footsteps sounded nearer and nearer, and at last they stopped underneath the window.

Then Kaspar flung out the treasures, and a noise of scrambling and merry shouts rose from below. Kaspar peeped over the window-ledge. Linda drew near to him.

"Dost see the little Stranger-child?" she asked.

"No, but I think of him," answered Kaspar, softly. "Who knows but he may be there!"





#### CHAPTER II.

KASPAR'S ADVENTURE WITH THE PURPLE-THROATED PIGEON—THE WONDERFUL TOYS.

the high roofs, and on the ground, on the high roofs, and on the rows of peaked windows dotted over them. It was clinging to the gables and pinnacles of the Seminary and the old University that were close by the house in which Kaspar lived, and it had coated over the spire of the University Church.

Kaspar looked down into the courtyard, and everything was pure white—white, cold, and still. The tiny fountain that threw a tinkling jet into the little pool was frozen, so was the pool itself, and the ducks could not make a hole in it, so they were obliged to sit on the stone copings and say, "Quack, quack!" And no one knew what that meant. It seemed to have so many meanings that it would be

impossible to understand them all. At least Kaspar thought it must mean everything, since they never said anything else.

The courtyard was a wonderful place. In summer it was full of flowers, and there was an arbour with a willow-tree hanging over it, and falling close upon the ground, leaving only a narrow opening for entrance. And when one was inside it, and the sun was shining, it seemed as if it had walls and ceiling of a green quivering material, somewhat resembling green water frozen into a half-transparent substance, in which rays of light were imprisoned.

Then there was a summer-house, many-windowed, with a pointed roof; also there was a curious little chapel, made of wood and bark, with windows of coloured glass; and if one peeped within, one saw the figure of a monk, as large as life, seated near the altar, deep in meditation. He wore a brown dress and a girdle round his waist; his head was shaven, and his feet were bare. All through long summer days and winter nights he sat immovable; heat and cold, darkness and light, were all alike to him. Kaspar had watched

him so long that he often felt quite a pity for him, and in the summer would steal in and place a bouquet of flowers upon the altar, so that the monk might have some new object to look upon. Indeed, when he was younger, he had begged his mother to give him a pair of shoes and a warm cloak for the monk in winter. However, he was wiser now, and yet he had his dreams about the monk at times

To-night the little chapel looked very peaceful in the starlight, and Kaspar wondered whether the monk knew that it was Christmas-eve, and that all the people in the old city had been making merry.

He must have known that it was some holiday, for the wheels of the great printing-press that occupied the lowest range of rooms on one side of the court had ceased to work, and there were no lights flashing out as there usually were until quite late in the winter evenings. It must have been very dull for the monk without the pleasant light streaming into his lonely chapel, and sending gay painted shadows dancing upon the walls and floor, and on his thin white hands.

Nothing was stirring in the court. The watch-dogs that roamed there after dark were all asleep—the lights were out—the far-off lamps in heaven alone shed a lustre upon the snow-fringed firs that rose high into the air above the monk's dwelling-place.

It looked very beautiful to-night, this courtyard, more beautiful than in the day-time, more beautiful even than in the summer, when all the flowers were out, and the great vine was full of leaves.

The snow sparkled on the ground like a carpet of cloth of silver, and glittered like silver fret-work upon the shrubs and on the leafless branches, and made the snow-covered roof and pinnacles look as if studded with crystals against the cloudless blue sky. And the stars twinkled brightly, and seemed the only things awake, as perhaps they were, for all else is in the night-time too sleepy to keep awake to watch the earth.

Kaspar could scarcely bear to leave the window; but at length he closed the shutter softly, and sprang into his little bed, where he soon fell asleep.

He had not slept long before he heard a

gentle tapping at the outer shutter, as if a bird were pecking at it.

He started up. Perhaps it was one of the pigeons who lived in the pigeon-house on the roof opposite, and which he fed every day.

He was not long in doubt, for suddenly the window flew open, and a flood of rich warm light poured into the room, as though the summer sun were bursting forth at midnight. And a grey pigeon, with a green and purple throat that shone like amethyst and gold, fluttered into the room, and settled himself on the bed.

Kaspar put out his hand to stroke the pigeon, and the bird rubbed his head against it as though returning the caress.

"How tame you are to-night," said Kaspar.

"That is because it is Christmas-eve," answered the Pigeon; "many wonderful things happen on Christmas-eve.

"Do they?" asked Kaspar.

Yet it did not seem wonderful to him that he was talking to the Grey Pigeon, or that the Pigeon should answer him. Indeed it appeared to be the most natural thing in the world.

And all the time the light was growing

clearer and mellower, and he could see all his Christmas presents with strange distinctness. Moreover, there was something peculiar in the light, for it made the wooden horse look as though he shook his well-carved mane; and the dog was certainly wagging his tail. Yes, he was not mistaken. And now the lion roused himself, and, giving a low growl, was about to spring upon a lamb that stood trembling at a little distance, when a whole regiment of leaden soldiers faced round and pointed their muskets at him.

In getting out of their way the lion went too near the edge of the table; he overbalanced himself, and fell to the floor with a crash that Kaspar thought must at least have broken all his legs; but he got up as if nothing had happened, and began to growl fiercely. Kaspar raised himself up to see what would happen next, and, behold, a little figure made of sugar, with a spangled dress and wings of silver gauze, advanced to the edge of the table, and, waving her wand, said—

"You must be tame to-night. As king of the beasts, you ought to set a better example." The lion looked very much ashamed of himself, and his ears went down, and he tried to hide himself in the fringe of a mat; but the Sugar-fairy called to him to come up again, when, in a marvellously agile manner, he crept up the leg of the table, and laid himself down at her feet.

"Let me have no more trouble with you," said the Sugar-fairy, giving him a tap with her wand.

Just then the door of the ark opened, and Noah and his wife and his sons and his daughters walked out, and all the animals under their care marched forth in pairs.

Noah's three daughters looked half-bewildered as they found themselves in such a blaze of light, and then all three sat down and began to cry.

"What is the matter?" asked Kaspar, slipping out of bed and going up to the table.

"They dress us such frights that we are quite ashamed of ourselves," said they.

And truly their dress was not becoming; Kaspar had seen nothing like it in real life, and he now seemed to understand what was meant when people were said to look as if they came out of the ark.

One of them had on a dingy brown dress, another a dusky red, another a shabby dark blue; and they all had high black hats, and a row of yellow painted buttons down their dresses.

"It's a shame for the toymakers to put us into such clothing; we were never accustomed to anything of the kind," sobbed one.

"Look at our clumping boots," sobbed another, showing her foot, with its clumsy covering. "If we'd worn such things as these, we should have been able to tell you who first heard the sound of boots upon the stairs. What a clatter they make!" And the third wept more bitterly than ever.

"Yes," replied Kaspar; but he thought it very likely that there were no good bootmakers in those days.

At that moment Noah called to them to join the procession that was being formed, so they started up, with the tears still running down their faces, and fell into line at the head of the train of animals that had come out of the ark and were drawn up ready for marching.

They looked odd enough. There was the raven quite as large as the cat, and the donkey almost the size of the elephant; the lamb larger than the lion, and the grasshopper bigger than the mouse. Perhaps that was the reason he could hop so well; and he sprang up and down, and made such a chirping, that the turkey, who had puffed out his feathers and looked very fierce, threatened to make an end of him if he did not keep in the ranks and behave himself.

The carved animals were in better proportion, and moved their limbs much more gracefully than their neighbours from the ark.

The Sugar-fairy was about to spring upon the white horse, when the Captain of the artillery regiment drew near, and, bowing respectfully, threw his scarlet cloak over the horse's back, and helped the fairy to mount.

Then he drew back, and, placing his hand on his heart, bowed again, gazing mournfully at the little lady, and sighing so deeply that Kaspar thought he must be in pain.

But just then he heard one of the lieutenants whispering to his companion, "Our Captain

has fallen in love with the Sugar-fairy, and he wishes to clip her wings to keep her always with him."

At this speech the Lion began to growl furiously, and to lash his tail about.

But the Sugar-fairy said-

"Be still, sir;" and the Lion became submissive in a moment.

"The Lion is in love with the Sugar-fairy too," whispered the Lieutenant, in a still lower tone, so that the Lion could not hear.

"How funny!" exclaimed Kaspar.

The Lieutenant looked round, and nodding confidentially to Kaspar, explained—

"The Lion is king of the beasts, you know, and he wants a queen."

"Couldn't he find a lioness?"

The Lieutenant laughed. "No; he wants something tamer. Lionesses are very fierce."

"Yes," replied Kaspar, thoughtfully; but somehow he could not help thinking that a lioness would be a more suitable match.

"That has nothing to do with it," said a Gutta Percha Head, with comical black eyes, and a very wide mouth.

"What?" asked Kaspar.

- "Suitability," returned the Head.
- "I did not say anything about suitability," said Kaspar.
  - "No, but you were thinking of it."
  - "How came you to know?"
- "I know everything," answered the Gutta Percha Head.
  - "I wish I did," said Kaspar.
- "You couldn't, unless head preponderated. You see I'm all head and no body; and you are more than half body, so it's not to be expected from you; that is the reason.
- "Ah!" ejaculated Kaspar; "but I could only be as you are by having my head cut off, and that would kill me; and then neither my head nor body would be of any use, and——"
- "You will only confuse yourself if you attempt to speculate," interrupted the Head; "it's always the way with people who have bodies—they can never reason clearly."

Kaspar did not know what to say in reply, for he did feel very much confused indeed; but fortunately, as he was getting more and more confused, he was recalled to himself by he Sugar-fairy's crying out—

## "March!"

And instantly the leaden soldiers, who had been ranging themselves in file, began to march, and the band of each regiment struck up its favourite tune, which it played as loud as possible, in order to drown the others.

"What a noise!" said Kaspar to the Gutta Percha Head.

"That is all owing to your body. Now I can hear each tune distinctly, without at all confusing one with another."

"I wish I could," returned Kaspar, putting his hands over his ears to keep out the discord.

"But how will the soldiers be able to get down from the table?"

As he spoke, the Sugar-fairy called out again, "Stand steady!"

And in an instant down went the table flat on the ground, as if the legs had collapsed, and had gone to nothing under it.

And the train marched onwards towards the door, which opened of its own accord, and the cavalcade proceeded through the passage to the drawing-room, which appeared to be still lighted up. And the bands played

as though the players were trying how much sound they could get out of their instruments.

"They will wake up little Fritz," exclaimed Kaspar.

"No fear of that," cooed the Grey Pigeon, who had seated himself on Kaspar's shoulder.

"Can't I wake up Linda to see it?"

"No; you must tell her about it in the morning."

Kaspar went along with the procession. He looked down to see how the Gutta Percha Head was getting along, and saw it rolling over and over like a ball.

"How dizzy it must be!" thought Kaspar.

"Not at all," said the Head, bounding up on a level with Kaspar's face, and settling itself on the shoulder opposite the Grey Pigeon; "carry me along, and we'll see the sight together."

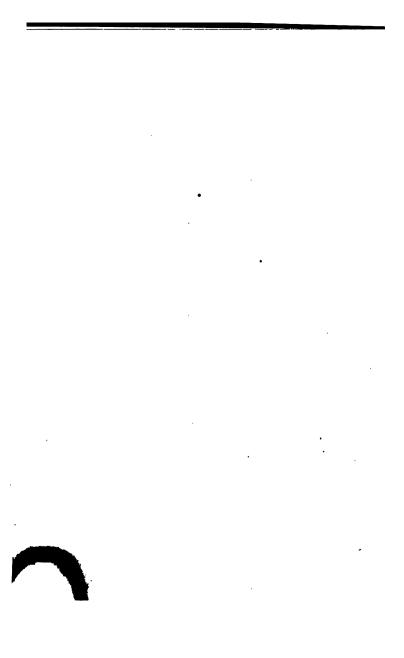
"Is there much to see? I thought it must be all over," answered Kaspar, wondering what would happen next.

"Hush!" said the Grey Pigeon; "the interesting part of it has not begun."

Kaspar was surprised on entering the drawing-room to find the Christmas tree still



KASPAR'S DREAM-THE WONDERFUL TOYS.



lighted, and that there were a great many more tapers than there had been on the previous evening. He could not help uttering an exclamation, for he was afraid that they would all be burnt out before morning, and Linda and Fritz would be disappointed, as they expected to see the tree lighted up again.

"Don't trouble yourself," said the Gutta Percha Head; "the Sugar-fairy has put inexhaustible burners on them, that burn away for ever without burning any of the wick. They always use them in Fairyland."

"That is wonderful, indeed. But everything is wonderful to-night." And, looking round, he saw the little dog Gibby, dressed in his new paletot bound with scarlet, and his new collar and bell, seated on one of the sofa cushions that he had dragged down on the ground. His forepaws were thrust into a tiny muff; and he had a green cap, with a long white feather in it, stuck on his head.

Near him was stretched at ease a large white Poodle, that was wont to roam about in the courtyard, and was always very dirty. No one ever appeared to wash him, and his hair was matted together. Nevertheless, he was reckoned a sagacious dog, in spite of his unprepossessing appearance.

Instinctively Kaspar sprang towards the Poodle, for he was comfortably established upon a new white rug.

The Poodle had on a pair of gold spectacles, and a gold chain, with a huge watch and seals.

He looked calmly up at Kaspar, and wagged his tail.

- "I shan't dirty the rug," said he; "I had a good roll in the snow this morning."
- "I saw you," replied Kaspar; "but I did not think that it cleaned you much."
  - "Look at me now," returned the Poodle.
- "Certainly you are white enough now," responded Kaspar, looking at him more attentively.
- "Snow-white," said the Poodle; "but it will all go by morning."
  - "What do you mean?"
- "It's only a coating; it will melt away as soon as I get into my old quarters."
- "How did you get out of them," asked Kaspar, who had often heard the shaggy

Poodle howling disconsolately when he was left by his master; for though Kaspar had a high opinion of the Poodle's ability, yet he had never heard of his being able to open doors that were locked.

"The Sugar-fairy lent me a key," said the Poodle.

"The Sugar-fairy can do everything, it seems," said Kaspar.

"She can," returned the Poodle with a short bark, placing his paw on his heart.

"Are you in love with the Sugar-fairy too?" asked Kaspar.

The Poodle gave a succession of barks, and with some difficulty showed his teeth, his long hair being much in the way.

"Take care; you are treading on dangerous ground," he answered.

"I beg your pardon; I did not mean to annoy you," returned Kaspar, moving a little away, for the Poodle still continued uttering half-suppressed growls.

"Poor Sugar-fairy!" thought Kaspar; "I wonder what will become of you—a Captain of artillery, a Lion, and a Poodle all in love with you! I should choose the Captain."

"Should you?" said the Gutta Percha Head; "wait till you have seen the end."

Kaspar had forgotten the Head, so he started when he heard a voice answering his thoughts.

"Sit down," said the Grey Pigeon. And Kaspar threw himself into a large arm-chair, the Pigeon and the Gutta Percha Head still perched upon his shoulders.

"Why does the Poodle wear spectacles?" he whispered.

"Because his hair dangles over his eyes, and prevents his seeing without them."

Kaspar thought it would be a better plan to shake the hair out of his eyes, and do without the spectacles.

"So he might if he had not a body," observed the Gutta Percha Head.

"I do not see it," said Kaspar, perplexed.

"Of course not, because you have a body too."

"But-" began Kaspar.

"Don't worry yourself," interrupted the Grey Pigeon; "look at what is going on."

The procession was marching round the Christmas tree. The lights glittered on the

gay dresses of the soldiers, and made their swords and bayonets flash. The eyes of the carved animals shone like balls of fire, the white horse seemed to have turned into silver, and the Sugar-fairy looked more beautiful than ever—the crown upon her head sparkled with real diamonds, and the spangles upon her robe were turned to stars of fire. The Lion kept close to her, and every now and then he looked round to see if the Artillery Captain was keeping at a respectful distance.

Presently Kaspar observed the white Poodle looking at his watch, and after he had examined it carefully, he nodded to Gibby, saying, "Time's up."

Then Gibby stood up on his hind legs, and taking one paw from his muff, drew from the pocket of his new paletot a small ivory whistle, and whistled three times.

Immediately the bands ceased playing. The train, by some inexplicable movement, formed into square before Kaspar had time to see how it was done, and advanced in a solid body within a few inches of the cushion on which the Poodle was seated.

"Halt!" cried Gibby, who was still standing on his hind legs, waving the whistle.

"Why have you come here to-night?" asked the Poodle of the Sugar-fairy.

But the Sugar-fairy made no answer.

Then the Poodle called to the Lion, but the Lion only growled, and seemed as though he would spring upon the white Poodle, or upon anything else that came in his way.

"Will no one speak?" roared the Poodle, turning to the Captain of artillery.

But the Captain of artillery only bowed incessantly, and placed his hand on his heart. He was too much overcome with emotion to answer.

"Why can't you speak out like a man?" shrieked the Poodle, working himself up into a passion—"why can't some one speak? I insist upon knowing the reason."

"It all comes of having a body," said the Gutta Percha Head, rolling off Kaspar's shoulder, and bowling along the ground until he found himself in front of the Poodle, when he righted himself with a jerk, and the ends of the tie round his throat stood straight out on either side as if they had been stiffly starched.

- "Please your majesty," began the Gutta Percha Head.
  - "I'm not your majesty," growled the Poodle.
- "I beg your pardon. My lord, I should have said, for I see by your wig and spectacles that you belong to the legal profession."
- "No, I don't. And I don't wear a wig; it's all my own hair."
- "I think I can prove that you are mistaken," answered the Gutta Percha Head, "if you'll answer a question or two."
- "I'll answer nothing," howled the Poodle. "You're an impostor."

But here Gibby advanced and whispered something to the Poodle, who thereupon said gruffly to the Head—

- "Speak."
- "How is the door to your master's room fastened?"
  - "There's a bar across it."
  - "Did you ever bark to be let in?"
  - "Yes."
- "Then you've pleaded at the bar," said the Gutta Percha Head; whereat the Poodle looked a little foolish, and all the leaden soldiers began to laugh.

"Silence," cried Gibby; and the Gutta Percha Head proceeded—

"Supposing two bones were given to you, one with meat on it, and one without; which would you choose?"

"The one with meat upon it."

"Right," returned the Head; "it shows you to be a good judge. Now if you have pleaded at the bar, and are a good judge, what is there to prevent your being a member of the legal profession?"

"I never thought of it," said the white Poodle, a little mollified.

"Of course not; no one with a body would think of it. I should not have been able to prove it if I had not been all head; but having proved that you are duly qualified, I beg to make known to you that the company present have assembled in order to request your lordship to decide a case for them."

The Poodle drew himself up with an air of importance, settled the spectacles on his nose, and looked gravely at the Gutta Percha Head.

"State the case."

"Isn't that irregular, my lord?" suggested Gibby; "the Head has nothing to do with it."

"Mind your own business," returned the white Poodle. "If I am a judge, I know how to conduct cases."

And he nodded to the Gutta Percha Head to proceed.

"It's a love affair, your lordship," said the Gutta Percha Head.

"Proceed," said the poodle, placing his paw on his heart, and assuming a sentimental attitude.

"My lord, the Captain of artillery and the Lion are both in love with the Sugar-fairy, and wish you to decide between them."

"Why, so am I!" exclaimed the Poodle.

"That has nothing to do with the matter," returned the Gutta Percha Head.

"It has everything to do with it," retorted the Poodle. "As I am a judge, I shall, of course, give judgment in my own favour. I shall marry the Sugar-fairy myself; and the Captain and the Lion may go to the Tropic of Capricorn, or anywhere else they please."

"But they don't please; and you can't settle it that way, for perhaps the Sugar-fairy wont marry you." "Sugar-fairy!" shouted the Poodle.

The Sugar-fairy sprang from her horse.

- "I hope she won't marry him," murmured Kaspar to the Grey Pigeon; "the Captain's the best of the three."
  - "Hush!" returned the Pigeon.
- "Sugar-fairy," said the Poodle, "is it your pleasure to marry the Captain of artillery?"
  - "No, my lord," replied the Sugar-fairy.
  - "Is it your pleasure to marry the Lion?"
  - "No, my lord."

The Poodle looked triumphantly at the Gutta Percha Head, and then, in as soft a voice as he could command, demanded—

- "Sugar-fairy, is it your pleasure to marry me?"
  - "No, my lord."

There was a half-suppressed titter through the court. The Poodle pushed up his spectacles, and his eyes glared angrily on the assembly.

"But you must marry one of us. It has been submitted to the decision of the law, and it is for me to give judgment. I decide in favour of myself."

There were murmurs of "Unfair" among

the leaden soldiers, and howls of disapprobation amongst the wild beasts.

Gibby drew near to the Poodle, and they conversed in low tones for some time. Then the Poodle turned to the audience.

"I find this is a matter which is beyond the power of a legal decision. I therefore decree that it be decided by combat—the Captain of artillery and the Lion to fight until one of them is overcome, and then I will lay aside my legal state and fight with the conqueror until one of us is vanquished."

The proposition met with loud applause, for it was entirely in unison with the feelings of those assembled. The Sugar-fairy was the only one who seemed to object; she drooped her wings, and the sparkle of her crown was dimmed, and her robe ceased to give forth flashes of brightness.

"Florimel! Florimel!" she murmured, "thou hast deceived me. Thou didst promise to meet me here to-night."

But no one heeded her.

The colour came into the Captain of artillery's face, and he drew out his sword and made two or three passes in the air. The

Lion tossed back his mane, and showed his teeth and claws. The Gutta Percha Head rolled into the midst of the soldiers, calling out—

"Clear a space! clear a space!"

The soldiers and beasts fell back, forming a ring round a clear open space on the shining floor.

"Advance, trumpeters!" shouted the Head.

And the trumpeters from each regiment placed themselves together, and advanced towards the Gutta Percha Head, who had mounted on a footstool at one side of the arena. The Sugar-fairy had flown up beside him, and, hiding her face in her hands, began to weep.

"Blow, trumpets!" shouted the Gutta Percha Head.

And the trumpets sounded, and the combatants advanced. Nearer and nearer they came, the Captain in his dark-blue suit with red stripes, and his sword flashing in the light of the Christmas-tree tapers. His step was firm, his lips compressed; and, with his determined air, he looked as though he deserved to win.

"I hope he will conquer," muttered Kaspar; but the Lion looks awfully strong."

The Lion did look strong; he came half-gliding, half-springing, lashing his tail, and darting fiery glances from his eyes.

The two were almost close together.

The Lion gave a roar—the Captain raised his sword—the fight began.

Now the Captain had the advantage—now the Lion. They fought harder and harder, and became weaker and weaker, whilst the spectators looked on in anxious suspense. Now the soldiers cheered their comrade on—now the beasts gave a yell of exultation as the Lion gained an advantage over his adversary. At length the Lion, with a great effort, sprang upon the Captain, and, planting a paw on either shoulder, forced him to the ground, where they both rolled over and over.

It was a moment of breathless suspense. Then suddenly the Captain managed to free his right arm, and with a dexterous movement he plunged his sword into the Lion's throat. A shout of triumph arose from the soldiers, succeeded by an astonished silence. For lo! even as they shouted, the Lion had disap-

peared, and a Prince, beautiful as the morning, stood in his place, with a crown of gold upon his head.

The Captain, unhurt, sprang from the ground, his bleeding wounds miraculously healed, and gazed in bewilderment at his rival. But the Prince heeded not the Captain or the multitude. In a sweet, clear voice he exclaimed—

"Silver-wing! Silver-wing! I have won thee at last."

And at those words the Sugar-fairy lifted up her head; she shook her drooping wings, and her robe glistened with a fairer lustre. She flew to the spot where the Prince was standing, and clung to him.

"Thou wilt never leave me, Florimel?" said she.

"Never, never," answered Prince Florimel.

"The spell is worked out, and I am in my own form again." As he spoke he waved his sword, and another wondrous transformation took place. The carved tigers and horses disappeared, and in their place stood a goodly train of courtiers, who knelt before Prince Florimel and kissed his hand.

"Behold your future queen," said the Prince, presenting Princess Silver-wing to them.

"But I conquered the Lion; therefore the Princess is mine," said the Captain of artillery, who had somewhat recovered himself.

"My dear Captain," answered Prince Florimel, "circumstances alter cases. The Lion has vanished for ever, and I am much obliged to you for having rid me of him. Let us be friends, since in no case would the Princess ever have married you."

The Captain looked sorrowful, but he held out his hand to his rival.

"Will you permit me to kiss the Princess' hand?" he asked.

"Willingly," answered Prince Florimel; "we shall never forget the service you have rendered."

The Captain of artillery bent to kiss the Sugar-fairy's hand.

"Adieu, Princess!" he said; "I shall never have another love."

And the Captain retired slowly, and, with a melancholy air, placed himself at the head of his soldiers. The band began to play, and the regiment began to march slowly away, followed by the rest of the leaden troops.

"Stop, stop," said the Poodle; "I was to have fought the Captain after he had overcome the Lion."

"But the Sugar-fairy's won by the Prince; so there's nothing to fight about."

The Poodle looked thoughtful.

"Ah!" said he, "perhaps not, perhaps not."
"Look! look!" said the Grey Pigeon.

And Kaspar noticed that the Christmas tree was growing larger and larger, until it almost filled the room. Prince Florimel and the Princess Silver-wing, and all the fairy courtiers, had taken refuge among its branches, and the lilies and roses had sprung into life, and sent forth a rich perfume.

Brighter and brighter the tapers shone, more magnificent became the tree, higher and higher, wider and wider it grew, and the walls gave way before it, and still it grew and stretched out its branches until it reached a selendid crimson cloud that was floating over sky—a cloud, yet not a cloud, for out of the med to rise a golden city.

nd Kaspar heard the fairies send up a

shout of rejoicing as they reached the floating island of Fairyland.

Then suddenly the tree faded away, and a shower of tiny rockets shot across the sky, and twisted and turned and fell in golden showers, until the whole air seemed filled with a blaze of sparkles.

The Captain of artillery called to his men to return the salute.

- "Present!"
- "Fire!"

Louder, sharper than the rockets, and then the air was filled with dense smoke. Kaspar could not see anything; he could not hear anything; he was as if stunned. He rubbed his eyes, he tried to open them, for something seemed pressing heavily upon them, and at last, with a great effort, he succeeded.

It was daylight, and he was again in his room, and his Christmas presents were standing on the table just as he had left them when he went to sleep.

He heard Linda calling to him to get up.

- "I will not be long," he answered; "but did you hear the leaden soldiers firing?"
  - "What are you talking about, Kaspar?"

"Of the soldiers commanded by the Captain of artillery who wanted to marry the Sugarfairy."

"I think you are dreaming, Kaspar."

"No, I am not. It is all true. It was the Grey Pigeon that came; but I will tell you all about it when I am dressed."

And Kaspar made Linda the confidence of his night-adventure; but he did not breathe a word of it to Thekla or Marie, for he knew they would laugh at him, and would say it was all nonsense, though he was quite certain that it had all really happened.

"We shall see if anything wonderful occurs to-night," said Linda, at the conclusion of the narration; "if anything strange should happen again, then you can be quite quite sure that it was not a dream."

"I am quite quite sure now," replied Kaspar; "it was too real for a dream. I shall give the Grey Pigeon a whole piece of marchpane for himself for waking me up to see it all."

"Certainly," said Linda; "he quite deserves it."

Kaspar was very quiet through the day; and when he put away his gifts he tenderly

placed the Captain of artillery near the Lion and the Sugar-fairy; "for," said he, "the Captain has a brave heart, and it will be a happiness to him to watch over her and protect her."

Then he gave a little sigh.

"Ah! how I wish the Princess had married the Captain of artillery."





## CHAPTER III.

KASPAR'S ADVENTURE WITH THE FIRST WHITE PIGEON—
THE SQUIRREL PRINCE.

ASPAR had not been long asleep when he was awakened, as on the previous night, by a gentle tapping at the outer shutter.

"It is the Pigeon," he said to himself, as, breathless, he sat up in bed, awaiting what might happen.

Again the same soft mellow light flooded the room, the window flew open; but it was not the Grey Pigeon that fluttered in. A snowwhite Pigeon, cooing gently, waved his downy wings and greeted Kaspar.

"So you have come to-night," said the boy, stroking him. "I suppose you want an extra piece of marchpane to-morrow, for you're rather a greedy bird. Indeed I notice that you and your wife, and the other white pigeons,

who, I suppose, are your brother and sister, eat twice as much as the grey and brown ones; and to-day you drove the grey one away, and he flew back to the dovecot, and sat disconsolately there until you had finished your meal.

The White Pigeon hung his head a little.

"But we are tamer than the others," he exclaimed, as if in extenuation.

"I admit that," replied Kaspar; "you don't fly away when I put out my hand with more food, neither are you so timid as the others. Still I wish you were not quite so greedy; you are such lovely birds that I wish you were as good as you look."

"I was very hungry to-day," answered the White Pigeon; "the fowls and ducks had eaten up all the food that was scattered for us in the courtyard."

Kaspar half-smiled; then he said patronisingly, "My mother says that it is not well to make excuses."

"Perhaps so," returned the White Pigeon, a little testily; "but I did not come here to be lectured."

"What did you come for?" asked Kaspar.

"Well," said the White Pigeon, "I am not ungrateful, neither are my companions, for your kindness to us; and we have agreed to show our gratitude by opening your eyes to the wonders that lie around you, and yet would be invisible to you without our assistance. We are going to give you a glimpse of enchanted regions, and to show you what goes on in fairydom when mortals are asleep."

"Ah!" observed Kaspar, thoughtfully, "that was the reason that the Grey Pigeon came to me last night."

"Yes; and to-night I am going to take you a journey."

"Where?"

"Not far off, only to the garden of the Royal Palace. The Squirrel Prince will hold his court to-night."

"But the snow is on the ground, and the night-wind is cold."

"I have brought a robe for you; you will feel no cold with me. I shall carry you on my back, and we shall soon fly there."

Kaspar looked in astonishment on the White Pigeon, whom he could carry on one finger, and in more astonishment at a small

blue embroidered mantle and crimson velvet cap that were lying on the bed, large enough perhaps for one of Linda's tiniest dolls.

"Ah, I forgot!" exclaimed the White Pigeon, noticing Kaspar's look of wonder; and, plucking a white feather from his breast, "Just fasten this in the cap," he added, "and place the cap upon your head."

Kaspar did as he was desired; and he sat quite still for fear the cap, which was no bigger than a thimble, should slip off.

What was going to happen? Kaspar gave a little start. Then he balanced the cap, which was very near tumbling, and waited wonderingly.

Yes, it was really true; he was getting smaller, smaller, smaller—so small that very soon the blue cloak would be quite large enough for him; and the crimson cap already was beginning to feel a comfortable fit.

"Put it on," said the White Pigeon, pointing to the cloak.

Kaspar threw it over his shoulders, and as he did so he found himself attired in a complete court suit, with a sword hanging at his side. "How I wish Linda could see me!" he said, as he gazed at his silk stockings and diamond buckles.

The White Pigeon was close beside him, and now Kaspar only reached half-way up to his beak, in which was a gold bit and bridle.

Kaspar sprang upon the Pigeon's back; the Pigeon spread out his wings and darted through the open window. High into the air he rose; and Kaspar, looking down into the courtyard, saw it all shining with a beautiful green light that turned the snow and the frostcrystals into sparkling emeralds. And the roofs too, and the peaks and pinnacles of the University, and the spire of the University Church, seemed glittering with precious They turned into the broad road, stones. with its avenue of stately trees, that made a splendid arch of leafy shade in summer-time, and that in winter showed a delicate network of slender branches covered with frosted silver against the clear blue sky.

Not white as silver now, for the wonderful green light was shining here also, and the trees appeared as if coated with lovely green moss, and there was a look of verdure everywhere, despite its being Christmas-time, and there had been a heavy fall of snow.

Who had swept the snow away? What made the air so balmy and delicious, like a soft spring day? The birds were singing among the boughs, and gorgeous butterflies, gayer than any that Kaspar had ever seen, trembled among the trees, and looked like living flowers.

Kaspar and the White Pigeon arrived at the great square in front of the Royal Palace, and made for the iron gates before which the sentinels paced in the day-time. The windows of the Palace were all ablaze with light, and sweet strains of music floated towards them, which surprised Kaspar, for he knew that no one was living at the Palace. He was equally surprised, too, to see a regiment of soldiers drawn up in front of it; and on his right, where the cannons were ranged, he saw another file of soldiers, with soldiers at each gun, evidently awaiting the word of command. As Kaspar appeared in sight the word was given.

Bang—bang went the cannon; but the White Pigeon was not startled.

"They take you for the Prince of Astra-

can," said the Pigeon; "he is coming to-night."

"Had I not better tell them that they are mistaken?" asked Kaspar.

"Oh no; they will find it out in time. It's only a little waste of powder, which won't hurt them, for they don't use much."

"No," replied Kaspar; "they don't often fire; I wish they did. But why is the Palace lighted up so brightly?"

"You will know in time."

They approached the open gates.

"I thought the gates were always closed at sundown," said Kaspar.

"Ah! no one knows what happens in the midnight hours. That is the time for fairies. It is fairy day in the Palace Garden."

"Is that the reason of the beautiful light?"

"Yes; but it is not at its brightest yet. It will turn to gold, and crimson, and all colours, before the fairy sun sets."

"It is very beautiful," mused Kaspar.

And truly the garden in the wonderful light seemed as if restored to spring-tide. From the broad gravel-walk the snow had vanished, and the soft bands of turf were

fresh and green, the shrubs were in full leaf, and splendid flowers, whose names Kaspar did not know, were blooming on every side; whilst in the great avenue the acacia trees were shaking their shimmering leaves over the thousand lamps and lanterns that were hanging from their branches.

Such a blaze of light and colour! Kaspar was quite dazzled. The White Pigeon flew slowly along, that he might have an opportunity of observing the illuminations. For everything was illuminated to-night—even the fountain was so arranged that it seemed to throw up showers of coloured sparks that fell into a sea of liquid fire.

And, as the White Pigeon had told him, the light throughout the gardens became more intense, and shades of rose, amber, crimson, violet, and gold came quivering over the scene, like Northern lights snatched from the Polar skies and brought to grace the earth by fairy hands.

At one end of the avenue a throne was raised under a canopy of cloth of gold; and as Kaspar and the White Pigeon sailed slowly underneath the star-gemmed branches, the

crowd around the lower part of the dais opened, the heralds sounded their trumpets, and the band ceased playing.

"What is the matter?" whispered Kaspar.

"They think you are the Prince of Astracan," answered the Pigeon. "A lucky thing for you, since it gives you a chance of speaking to the Squirrel Prince."

But Kaspar did not think it so lucky, for perhaps the Squirrel Prince might be angry when he found out the mistake."

"Had we not better turn back?" he asked.

"Nonsense!" responded the White Pigeon, and he alighted close to the steps of the throne, where he contrived to slip Kaspar off his back.

Fortunately, Kaspar fell in a kneeling position, and his cap was jerked off his head in so jaunty a manner that he appeared to be performing a reverential salute.

"Welcome, O Prince of Astracan!" said the Squirrel Prince, advancing.

"If you please, your most gracious majesty," returned Kaspar, "I am not a prince; I wish I were."

"Don't wish it," replied the Squirrel Prince, with so deep a sigh that Kaspar was em-

boldened to raise his eyes. And, as he looked, it suddenly occurred to him that he must have seen the Squirrel Prince, though he could not call to mind when or where. The same thought evidently struck the Prince, for he said, in answer to Kaspar's look, "Yes, we have met before."

The Squirrel Prince was a fine brown fellow, with great mournful black eyes and a bushy tail; he had a crown of gold on his head, a scarlet sash across his breast, with a diamond star; a long sword hung at his side, and an ermine mantle was thrown over his shoulders. On his tail were five heavy rings of gold, to denote his royal birth.

As Kaspar looked around, he perceived that the squirrels immediately surrounding the throne wore smaller crowns of silver, their cloaks were made of swansdown, and they had one or more rings of silver on their tails. These were the peers, and Kaspar was astonished to see other adornments, not precisely ornamental, appended to their tails, such as a money-box, a bunch of seals, keys, an anchor, and one a miniature cannon.

These appendages appeared to cause their

wearers some anxiety, perhaps typical of the troubles of office; for Kaspar discovered, through a whisper of the White Pigeon, that these were the dignitaries of the state.

"Chancellor of Exchequer, War Minister, Lord High Admiral," &c., &c., &c., was the whisper. And Kaspar wondered what sort of a fleet the squirrels possessed, when suddenly he remembered a picture that he had once seen of a troop of squirrels embarked on pieces of wood, using their tails as rudders. The memory of this picture naturally gave him an insight into the labours of the Lord High Admiral, and he felt at once a profound respect for him.

"Yes, we have met before," repeated the Squirrel Prince, pensively.

"Where, your majesty?" asked Kaspar; for Kaspar having grown small, the Squirrel Prince looked so mighty a squirrel in his eyes that he was at a loss to remember where he had seen so fine a specimen, though there was something about him that seemed familiar.

"Princes are sometimes in misfortune," answered the Prince; "you gave me some nuts at a time when I must otherwise have

perished." And the Prince drew a cambric handkerchief from the pocket of his mantle and wiped away a tear. He was in low spirits to-night, which surprised Kaspar, as the Prince of Astracan was coming.

"He wishes the Prince of Astracan at the bottom of the Caspian Sea," said the White Pigeon, in a low tone.

It was perhaps not a benevolent wish; but Kaspar had not time to inquire into its merits, for suddenly a loud firing was heard outside the gates, and shouts arose from the soldiers and the plebeian squirrels, who had no adornments on their tails and no crowns on their heads, and some were even without the red fez that appeared to be the ordinary headgear of the squirrel commonalty.

Then a great clattering and flapping of wings was heard, and a troop of richly-dressed men, with olive complexions, mounted on scarlet flamingoes, galloped up the avenue.

The squirrel lords gave a feeble cheer, and the Astracanians, leaping from their flamingoes, and holding the gilded bridles in their hands, made low salaams.

The Prince of Astracan, giving his flamingo

into the keeping of an attendant, advanced towards the throne.

The Squirrel Prince descended to meet him, and the two embraced with cordiality in the sight of the assembly, who shouted with joy at the fraternal sight.

- "Hum!" ejaculated the White Pigeon.
- "Why?" asked Kaspar.
- "Not now," answered the White Pigeon; "wait."

The Lord Chamberlain made a sign to the musicians. The band struck up, and the two princes conversed, unheard by those around them.

And the brow of the Prince of Astracan grew darker and darker, until it was as black as ink; whilst the eyes of the Squirrel Prince grew larger and more melancholy, and his tail drooped sadly; but perhaps it was with the weight of royalty he carried upon it.

- "Uneasy lies the tail—no, the head," began Kaspar.
- "Never mind the rest," said the White Pigeon; "but listen to the song." For the band had ceased to play, and one of the Astracanians, at a sign from the Prince, came

forward with a tambourine all hung with silver bells, which he struck rapidly and twirled round and round, singing to the jingling accompaniment the following words:—

"In the Great Palace there sits a Queen,
Spinning, spinning, spinning,
Fairer than maid that ever was seen,
Well worth the winning, the winning.
Locked are the doors and lost is the key,
And she waits lonely, lonely;
Happy the Prince who finds it will be,
Him will she love, and him only."

The singer paused, and the Astracanians, in chorus, sang—

"Hail to our Prince; it is he, it is he
Who shall succour the Princess so lonely;
Through the wide world he now seeks for the key,
And the Spinning Queen waits for him only."

The Squirrel Prince involuntarily laid his paw on the hilt of his sword; Kaspar also laid his hand upon his, for there was something insulting in the tone of the singers.

The Squirrel Prince at once noticed the movement, and his eyes, meeting those of Kaspar, seemed to say—

"Be my friend."

And Kaspar nodded in the same friendly manner that he would have done to Linda. In his enthusiasm he forgot all about crowned princes, and only remembered that the Squirrel Prince was in trouble.

- "Does he know where the key is?" inquired Kaspar vaguely of the White Pigeon.
  - "Who?" said the White Pigeon.
  - "The Prince of Astracan."
  - "Certainly not."
  - "And the Squirrel Prince?"
- "No, neither he nor any other Prince, or else it would have been snapped up, the doors unlocked, and the beautiful Princess would have been married to her deliverer."
  - "Ah! true," replied Kaspar, thoughtfully.
- "Do you know where it is?"

The Pigeon shook its head.

- "Does anyone?"
- "Only the ancient Grofulus."
- "The who?" asked Kaspar.
- "The ancient Grofulus," repeated the White Pigeon; but Kaspar was no wiser.
  - "Why don't they ask the ancient-"
- "Grofulus," added the White Pigeon, seeing that Kaspar hesitated.

"Yes, Grofulus; why don't they ask the Grofulus to tell them?"

"They don't know that the Grofulus knows. And if they did know, they would not know where to find him."

A sudden thought darted into Kaspar's mind. "They might search for the Grofulus if they knew that he knew," he replied.

The White Pigeon seemed to understand Kaspar's train of thought.

"Remember that's a secret at present," said he; "a fair chance for everyone."

Kaspar became reflective, and opened his eyes so wide, in trying to see everything on every side, that the Prince of Astracan, who had just turned round to give some directions to his attendants, observed it, and asked in a rude tone—

"And, pray, what are you staring at with your great grey eyes? And why don't you take off your cap in the presence of royalty?" And he gave Kaspar's cap a jerk, and down it fell to the ground.

Kaspar's face grew scarlet in an instant, out flashed his sword from its scabbard, and he was about to rush upon the Prince of Astracan, when, with a loud yell, the Astracanians drew their scimitars, and Kaspar was surrounded by the fierce foreigners. The points of half-a-dozen of their weapons were at his breast, and the next moment might have been fatal to him had not the Squirrel Prince interposed.

The Squirrel Prince looked pensively at Kaspar, and Kaspar felt quite abashed at his breach of etiquette.

"You might be beheaded for it," whispered the White Pigeon. "What do you mean by attacking a royal prince?"

"He knocked off my cap," replied Kaspar, who was not accustomed to royal princes, but only to the boys at the High School.

"Brave and impetuous," murmured the Squirrel Prince, almost inaudibly. "I like the boy."

But Kaspar heard him, and whispered gratefully, "I hope your Majesty will find the key."

The Squirrel Prince's eyes gleamed brightly. Then he turned to the Prince of Astracan.

"I shall crave your mercy for this rash

youth," he said; "he is not accustomed to courts."

"I should think not," returned the Prince of Astracan, contemptuously; "he's not worth troubling about. I shall think no more of the matter."

"Now that's what I call mean and unfair," began Kaspar, indignantly; but the White Pigeon stopped him.

"Hold your tongue," said he, "or you'll spoil everything, and will never know anything about the Enchanted Princess."

Fortunately, a burst of lovely music had drowned Kaspar's words, so that the Prince of Astracan and his followers did not hear them. Such a lovely strain; no one knew from whence it came, and yet everyone stood spell-bound, listening to it, scarcely breathing, and quite motionless. And, as the music grew softer and sweeter, a voice, sweeter even than the music, sang—

"Over mountain and over sea

He must journey who would find me,
The keeper of the silver key.
Follow me, follow me, ye who dare;
I will show you the regions where

The key lies hidden. Up! through the air Follow me, follow me, ye who dare; Ye who would free the lady fair, Follow! follow! follow!

A chorus of silvery laughter came after the song, for how was it possible for anyone to follow an unseen guide?

The Prince of Astracan leaped upon his flamingo and struck his spurs into its side, and the Astracanians imitated their master; the flamingoes flapped their wings, and the whole troop rose in the air. And the sounds of the sweet music sounded fainter and fainter, and the Prince and his attendants seemed like a great crimson cloud, that grew smaller and smaller as it floated westward.

The Squirrel Prince wrung his paws, and tore the long bushy hairs from his tail, and cast the rings of royalty upon the ground. What were these baubles to him if he could not gain his love?

"Lost, lost, for ever lost, sweet dream of my heart! O lovely Princess! beloved, unknown, after whom I pine; never now shall I behold thee—never, never!" Kaspar was deeply moved at the Prince's distress. What could he do? He looked at the White Pigeon.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, and then his countenance fell. The Squirrel Prince was a dozen times as large as the White Pigeon; he was a monster squirrel (though he was very handsome), and it would have been useless to suggest the White Pigeon as a steed.

"Ha!" he exclaimed again, more hopefully, as another idea struck him, and he leaped upon the White Pigeon's back and cried, "Let us follow."

And the beautiful bird spread his wings and rose like a snowflake, his downy breast quivering with the gorgeous colouring that the fairy light cast upon it. Up almost to the stars it seemed to Kaspar, and into the blue night air, that made the fairy day below but seem the brighter. And there he glided along like a lily petal on the waves of a fair sea.

On, on after the crimson cloud, after the fairy music.

On—they were nearer now, and Kaspar could see the swarthy faces of the barbarians,

and the blood streaming down the flamingoes' sides.

On — on — they were still nearer. The flamingoes flew heavily; they were faint from loss of blood; their strength was almost exhausted.

But still the music was heard, though it was growing fainter and fainter, for the distance was gradually widening between it and the Prince of Astracan.

"They won't hold on much longer," said Kaspar.

"No; cruelty generally defeats itself. They'd have done better without spurs."

They were passing over a dark barren mountain.

"Over mountain and over sea," repeated Kaspar.

"Keep up," shouted the Prince. But it was of no use; the flamingoes could fly no farther; their wings drooped, and down sank the crimson cloud, as though it had been weighted with lead.

"It will take them some time to recruit, and to find their way home," said the White Pigeon.

- "Yes; and now we may find out where the fairy lives," replied Kaspar.
  - "How?"
  - "By following."
- "In what direction?" demanded the White Pigeon, drily.
  - "In the direction of the music."
  - "Do you hear it?"
  - "Why, no," returned Kaspar.

For whilst he had been watching the downfall of the Astracanians the fairy music had floated out of hearing.

"Well, at any rate," he said, "we know the direction, and we can return to the Squirrel Prince and tell him not to give up all hope. We must find the sea beyond the mountain, and perhaps the ancient Grofulus lives in those parts."

So they flew back, and found the Squirrel Prince pacing up and down in frantic rage and despair.

Kaspar placed himself before him.

"Listen to me, your Majesty," said Kaspar. And he narrated the result of the Prince of Astracan's attempt.

"Brave youth, wise youth, stay with me!"

exclaimed the Prince; "stay with me, and be my counsellor, for something tells me that thou art sent to guide me to my beloved, and that through thee I shall find the precious key sought for by so many princes."

"I will do my utmost, your Majesty," returned Kaspar, warming with zeal and loyalty; "you may reckon upon my faithful services."

"Kneel down, then," said the Squirrel Prince, "and receive the order of knighthood. From henceforth"—and he smote Kaspar gently on the shoulder—"thou art my chosen knight. Knight of the Silver Key, arise; and when I call upon thee I shall expect thee to do my bidding."

"To death, your Majesty," returned Kaspar, deeply affected.

For Kaspar was the soul of romance, and the adventure pleased him mightily.

"To-morrow, then," said the Squirrel Prince—"to-morrow will we concert our plans. Now to the banquet."

The draperies at the back of the throne were drawn aside, and lo! a splendid hall appeared, wherein were tables groaning beneath the weight of gold and silver dishes. The flowers, the fruits, the delicate viands, the lights, the dazzling array were too much for Kaspar after his aerial ride; everything seemed to swim round, he could see nothing distinctly; the gold and purple hues of fairy day grew dim. He closed his eyes. How cold he felt! He shivered, gave a sudden start, for he seemed to be falling, falling down a deep abyss.

Kaspar did not recover his senses until he found himself lying on his own little bed, and Linda calling him, as she had done on the previous morning.

He rose, he dressed, he told his adventure to Linda.

"And I am Knight of the Silver Key now," said he; "and I don't know what great service the Squirrel Prince may require of me tonight."

"And had you a real sword?" asked Linda.

"Yes; and silk stockings and great rosettes, with diamond buckles in my shoes."

Linda looked thoughtful.

- "And the Pigeon was quite safe; you were not afraid of falling off?"
  - "No; he was as steady as an old horse."
- "Only to think of the pigeons being fairy pigeons. Thekla and Marie would not believe it."
- "No; therefore you must not say anything to Thekla and Marie about it. One does not like to be laughed at; besides, the pigeons might hear their jests, and might not come again; and then we should never know whether the Squirrel Prince married the Enchanted Princess."
- "Or what became of the poor flamingoes. I hope their wounded sides will be cured."
- "We must feed the pigeons well to-day," observed Kaspar. And the children spread a dainty feast upon the window-sill, and soon the birds flew down from the roofs opposite.
- "Which carried you last night?" asked Linda, reverentially.
- "This one," said Kaspar; "see how tame he is; he lets me stroke him. He shall have a whole chocolate beetle to himself."
- "Ah, it is wonderful!" murmured Linda. And later on, when they went to play in the



FEEDING THE PIGEONS.



Palace Garden, and saw the snow glittering upon the ground, and the great acacia trees without a single leaf, and the water of the fountain frozen up, and not a flower to be seen, Kaspar said—

"It looked so different last night."

Just then a half-starved squirrel, tempted by the bright sun to think that spring was coming, peeped out of a great hole in a hollow tree.

"Hush! look there," whispered Kaspar.
"It is the Squirrel Prince; I know him by his great sorrowful eyes."

Linda held her breath.

"He seems hungry."

Kaspar had involuntarily taken off his cap; he was becoming already a courtier.

"Have you anything in your pocket?" whispered Linda.

"Some nuts and a gilt gingerbread----"

And Kaspar placed them on the ground.

"Now we will go away, Linda," said he; "it would not be polite to watch the Prince."

So they went away.

Once Linda could not help looking back.

The Squirrel was munching the gilt gingerbread very contentedly.

"Oh, Linda!" said Kaspar, a little reproachfully. But Linda had not been at court, so that it was not possible for her to understand about court etiquette.





## CHAPTER IV.

KASPAR'S ADVENTURE WITH THE SECOND WHITE PIGEON—THE ENCHANTED PRINCESS.

ASPAR wondered which Pigeon would come to him to-night. He would not go to sleep; he would lie awake, so as to be ready the very moment that the light should shine into his room.

It was quite dark now, for the outer shutters were closed, and the blinds drawn down, and Dorette had even put a great screen between the bed and the window to keep off any air that might creep through some tiny crevice.

"Ah! if she only knew how short a time I am in bed," thought Kaspar, as Dorette completed her arrangements; but of course he could not tell her so.

"Good night; dream sweetly, my child," said Dorette, as she closed the door.

"Good night," answered Kaspar.

Then he lay quite still, with his eyes peeping out from under the puffy eider-down quilt. He could not look at the window, for the screen was between it and his bed; but he watched the darkness around him, fancying every now and then that it was getting lighter. How long it seemed!

Kaspar began to feel sleepy.

No—he would not go to sleep; he would count in order to keep himself awake; so he began "one, two, three;" but it was of no use. It would be better to say over his new piece of poetry; but, alas! he grew drowsy at the fifth verse, and there were yet four others, but they seemed slipping away from his memory. Alas! perhaps he should be too sleepy to go with the next pigeon; for, when he came to think of it, he had been up two nights. And he was not accustomed to it. And then softly, very softly, the white eyelids dropped over Kaspar's grey eyes, and he slept peacefully.

Whilst he yet slept the window opened wide, and the light came streaming in, and a White Pigeon, the very counterpart of the

one that had visited him the night before, flew in.

Kaspar did not hear her, so she rubbed her white head on his cheek, and said—

"Wake up, wake up; put on your cap and mantle, and come with me."

And Kaspar, with a start, awoke.

"My mantle!" said he; "where is it?"

For he had forgotten what had become of it, or whether he had had it at all.

"Here," answered the Pigeon.

And there beside him lay not only the mantle and cap, but the court suit, and the sword, and the diamond buckles.

He was not long in dressing.

"You are the White Pigeon's wife, are you not?"

"Yes; my husband is very tired to-night. He did a good deal of flying after the Prince of Astracan."

"Ah yes," replied Kaspar, rousing up more and more. "Are we going after the Prince?"

"No; he is still on the desert island, where he will have to stay until the flamingoes have rested, and their sides are healed. We are not going far from home to-night." "Poor flamingoes!" ejaculated Kaspar.
"But where are we going?"

"Wait and see," returned the second White Pigeon, as Kaspar mounted her.

And away she flew along the great avenue; but half-way down she stopped, and, turning into a side gate, made her way towards the fountain in the Palace Gardens.

It was summer again to-night, although it had been winter through the day, and very sharp winter too. But now it was mild, delicious weather, and the scent of the roses stole sweetly into the air, and the mignonette and geraniums and pinks were in full bloom. And the broad walk round the fountain had been swept, and there was not a weed to be seen.

The goldfishes were darting about in the stone-coped pool into which the waters of the fountain dropped, and seemed to be enjoying the wonderful sunshine.

"I wish I had a bit of bread for them," said Kaspar, involuntarily.

"They will want something better than bread to-night," said the White Pigeon.

"What?" asked Kaspar.

- "Crystal-frosted bonbons," answered the White Pigeon.
  - "Why?"
- "Because we must bribe them to let us into the Palace by the secret way. And they care for nothing but crystal-frosted bonbons."
  - "But I haven't got any."
  - "Feel in your pockets."

And Kaspar, putting his hand into his pocket, drew out a most wonderful assortment of sweetmeats of all kinds, shapes, and colours, coated over with what seemed to be silver-frost, but which was in reality very clear fine sugar.

- "How pretty!"
- "So the fishes think."
- "And how nice!" he added, as he put one into his mouth.
  - "Such is also the opinion of the fishes."

And then the White Pigeon dipped her head three times in the water, and flapped her wings, and in short acted so like a fiery Pegasus that Kaspar was obliged to cling fast to her neck. But it was over in a moment, and she had attracted the attention of an old

goldfish, whose scales were beginning to look a little dingy with age.

"Bonbons, crystal-frosted bonbons to sell," said the White Pigeon—"a large supply, a fine supply—the most delicate bonbons in the world. Who'll buy, who'll buy?"

By this time a whole bevy of goldfishes had congregated round the old one.

"I will—I will," was shouted on all sides; "what's the price, what's the price?"

"Three thalers a dozen for the large ones, two thalers a dozen for the little ones," returned the Pigeon.

"That's a great deal too much," whispered Kaspar.

"Nonsense," said the White Pigeon; "if they've no money to pay with, one may as well ask a large sum as a small one."

Kaspar tried to reason out the force of the White Pigeon's argument, but without success, and was lost in wonder at the demand.

"We've no money," said the Goldfishes, sorrowfully; "we've no money."

"Throw a dozen of them into the water," said the White Pigeon aside to Kaspar.

Kaspar did as he was desired, now wondering at the Pigeon for being as lavish as she had before been exacting.

There was an immediate rush, a scuffle, a confused beating about of golden tails, and a shivering and splintering of the calm surface of the water. By degrees it subsided, and the goldfishes popped up their heads to see if more bonbons were coming.

- "Good, are they not?" asked the Pigeon.
- "Good, very good," answered the fortunate devourers.
  - "More, more," chorused the whole troop.
- "But you've no money," answered the Pigeon; "you don't expect I'm going to give them to you for nothing?"

Then were the goldfishes sorrowful; but the old one, who had succeeded in securing for himself a large raspberry drop and a small lavender one, began to negotiate.

- "If we have no money, perhaps we can furnish you with something you may like as well. There are delicate slugs and waterbeetles down below."
- "Slugs and water-beetles!" responded the White Pigeon, contemptuously. "I much

prefer silver-frosted bonbons, and I have plenty of those with me."

- "Alas! alas! said the old Goldfish.
- "Alas! alas! alas!" said also the little ones.
- "Is the Palace guarded to-night?" asked the White Pigeon, carelessly.
- "Yes, it is always guarded; the sentinels have been doubled since the Prince of Astracan flew by with his flamingoes."
- "Then one cannot enter, and the Knight of the Silver Key will be unable to obtain a sight of the Spinning Princess."

There was a movement in the pool. Two or three grave-looking elders swam up to the old one who had first spoken, and began conversing with him in undertones.

Presently he popped up his head.

"How many bonbons have you to part with?"

The White Pigeon considered for a moment.

"Twenty-five each for the young ones, fifty a-piece for you old ones."

Kaspar tugged violently at the Pigeon's feathers.

"I have not a quarter so many in my pockets."

- "Leave me to manage affairs," returned the Pigeon.
- "There is a secret way to the Palace," said the old Goldfish, after a little more consultation with his peers; "it opens from the pool. Will you give us all the bonbons you have with you if we will let you through?"
  - "Yes."
  - "Shower them down, then."
- "No; you must open the door for us first."
  - "Come quickly, then," answered the fish.
- "Shut your eyes and mouth for a moment," said the White Pigeon to Kaspar; "we are going through the water."
  - " Is it safe?"
  - " Quite."
- "But we can't give them the bonbons you promise."
  - "Wait and see."

For one moment Kaspar felt the waters closing round him, and then he was landed safely in a vaulted passage, lighted with lamps.

"Unfasten the hampers that are tied under my wings," said the White Pigeon. There were no less than six beautifully-gilt hampers, and on each hamper was written—

"IOOO CRYSTAL-FROSTED BONBONS."

Kaspar wondered he had not noticed them before.

"Why, there are more than you promised!" he exclaimed.

"Push them into the water," replied the Pigeon.

This was easily done, for the water was like a wall against the aperture at which Kaspar and the White Pigeon had entered. It did not flow in, but remained like a door of glass, through which Kaspar could see the fishes moving and crowding up to the entrance. He observed to the Pigeon that it was very strange that the water should not come in; and the Pigeon, in answer, said something about gravitation and attraction which Kaspar did not understand. Therefore he thought there was not much in it; and it is very likely that he was right.

However, he rolled the hampers, one by one, into the pond, and as each splashed in a great shout went up among the great and little fishes. They were quite content with their part of the bargain; so were Kaspar and the White Pigeon, who proceeded along the winding passage until they came to a door guarded by two sentinels.

The White Pigeon tapped at the door with her beak, and one of the sentinels looked through.

"Only a Pigeon," said he; "it will make us a good supper. And he opened the door, and the White Pigeon, with Kaspar on her back, glided in.

When the sentinels saw Kaspar, they shouldered their arms and stood at ease; but, feeling that it was not a movement likely to effect much, they presented arms, and were about to fire, when the White Pigeon suddenly cried out—

"Right about face!"

And the sentinels mechanically did as they were commanded, and stood with their backs to Kaspar and the White Pigeon, and their faces to the entrance that they had so carelessly guarded. And, what was more, they could not turn back again, in spite of their efforts to do so.

"They are safe for some hours," observed the Pigeon; "and by that time we shall have quitted the Palace."

Having no longer any fear of the sentinels, Kaspar was able to take a survey of the hall in which he found himself. It was very magnificent; the walls and floor were inlaid with rare and curious wood, and it was lighted by twelve lamps swinging from the ceiling.

"I don't remember this room," said Kaspar.
"We did not see it when my father took Linda and me over the Palace."

"Of course not," answered the Pigeon.
"This is one of the fairy rooms, deep down under the Palace; no mortal eye has ever seen this set of apartments."

"Ah!" responded Kaspar, meditatively.

And then they entered a second hall, more splendid even than the first, and this was lighted by twenty-four brilliant lights, swinging in golden censers from the gilded rafters. The chains by which they were suspended were of the purest gold, and the censers were studded all over with precious stones.

Twelve statues of white marble, six on either side, adorned the room; they were

veiled, but Kaspar knew by the heaving of their bosoms that they were weeping.

"Why do the statues weep?" he asked.

"They weep until the Princess is set free; and that is not to be until she has seen some one whom she loves as well as she did the earth-born Prince, who sojourned one fair, joyous time in the beautiful apartments of the Palace above, and gladdened the hearts of his loving people. Wait till we have seen the Princess, and then I will tell you the story.

"This is the hall of music. All the music that the earth-born Prince loves is gathered into it, and its strains float magically through the air. It is so sweet that the statues weep at its sweetness, and long for liberty, and joy, and love. But till the Princess is set free that is hopeless. Listen; can you not hear it now?"

And through the hall came magic music, swelling like the deep chords of an Æolian harp; now rising, now falling, fitful as the wind sweeping over silver strings—more lovely even in its sound than when the earth-born Prince hears it in his theatres and palaces.

Now loud, now soft, now joyous, now

melancholy; and with every change of the cadence Kaspar's eyes lighted up, or filled with tears; and once he shouted "Viva!" at some triumphant burst.

But the veiled statues still wept on monotonously; one chord alone was sounding in their hearts.

At the end of the hall was an arch, and through this arch a smaller apartment, hung luxuriously with the costliest damask. And the ivory pillars were wreathed with living flowers; and mirrors, vases, pictures, statues, and all that was beautiful were crowded into it. It was a boudoir of art treasures, such as one only sees in kings' palaces.

But Kaspar scarcely noted them, for in the middle of the room, seated at a golden spinning-wheel, sat the loveliest lady he had ever seen.

Everything round her and near her seemed of gold—the chair on which she was seated, the thread that she was spinning, the slippers on her tiny feet, the girdle that bound her flowing robe of white. Even her hair, that hung in waving masses to her feet, seemed like a veil of spun gold thrown over her.

Very sorrowful she looked; her face was quite pale, and her blue eyes seemed as though they were looking far, far away, even to the city of art treasures, where dwelt her earthborn love. Yes, she was thinking of him, for now and then she sighed. But still she went on with her task, spinning, spinning; for the thread would never be ended until a Prince of fairyland had won her love.

"And how came she to see this earth-born Prince, and care for him?" asked Kaspar.

"Ah! she was a Water-Sprite, and lived in the river that rolls by this old town; and when it was sounded through the land that the King was coming hither to see his loyal people, she also heard of it. She heard, moreover, that he was young and beautiful, and had the heart of a poet, and painter, and sweet musician; and that his eyes made everyone that looked into them love him, and that his smile was worth a mine of gold to win.

"And so she longed to see this earth-born one, who so far exceeded all the princes of the water-kingdom; and she besought her mother to give her permission to leave the river for a day, in order that her own eyes might know whether all that was said of the young Prince was true.

"And after much persuasion the old Water-Queen agreed to grant her petition. 'But,' she said, 'you must be at home again before sundown, or you will have to stay a hundred years upon the earth, and never see any of your beloved relatives again.'

"The Water-Princess, overjoyed at having obtained her wish, next thought of how she should see the Prince, and she decided to put on the dress of a peasant, and to mingle with the crowd, and so win perhaps even a smile for herself.

"There were grand preparations in the old town; and the Palace which was seldom used was set in order, and its beautiful furniture all uncovered, and the tapestry carefully dusted, and the windows opened, so that the fair daylight might wander in, and wonder at all the beauty it saw there.

"And the Prince came and took up his residence in the grand suite of rooms prepared for him, looking over the great square. And the soldiers were drawn up, and the bands

played, and the people in their gayest dresses promenaded, and tried to get as near to the Palace doors as possible, so that they might better see the Prince. And when he stepped out on the great balcony over the doorway, the people shouted with joy to see their sovereign. And there he stood in all the pride of youth and beauty, and perhaps he thought that it was a great and glorious thing to be a king. But also deep down in his heart lay other thoughts, and he knew that there were those upon earth who were greater and more glorious than even kings.

"The Water-Princess, in her peasant dress, struggled through the crowd, near enough to have a glimpse of those dreaming eyes that the people were all talking about. And perhaps he saw her, for, as his eyes wandered over the vast assembly, suddenly he smiled, as if pleased with something. Perhaps it might be with the lovely face that looked up adoringly.

"It was enough; she watched and watched outside the Palace until he came forth, and as he rode through the city she followed in the train. She could not bear to leave him.

"And the day declined, and the sun dropped lower and lower in the sky, until he sank to rest behind the vine-clad hills. Then all at once she remembered what her mother had said. But it was too late now. She had lost her home and her people, but she had found a monarch who was more to her than even these. Yet she felt sorrowful.

"How should she see him again? She cast away her peasant's dress and appeared in her own floating robes, with her golden hair bound with water-lilies. She made herself invisible, and slipped into the grand hall, where dancing was going on, and the Prince was moving graciously among the dancers.

"Ah! she was but a spirit, or she would have glided in clad in festive array, and perchance he might have chosen her as his partner. As it was, she remained invisible, and ever followed the young Prince, a beautiful and unseen shadow. The hours rolled on, the moments seemed to fly, and one by one the guests departed. Still the Water-Princess lingered, and when the Prince had thrown himself exhausted on his luxurious couch, she suddenly appeared to him in her own form.

He gazed upon the sweet vision, and believed himself to be dreaming. He spoke, but she answered not. There she stood, with her white arms crossed upon her breast, and her blue, starlike eyes fixed upon him.

"Then she sighed.

"'Why dost thou sigh?' asked the dreaming Prince.

"'Alas! that I were mortal,' sobbed the Water-Sprite.

"'Weep not; thou art fairer than mortals,' he answered; 'thou art poetry itself, the personification of the beautiful that has long been in my heart. Thou art the realisation of my ideal. Where shall I find a mortal like unto thee? Oh, sweet vision! stay with me for ever, and in adoring thee I shall never want earthly love.'

"But as he spoke the Princess wept more sorely, and as she wept her form grew fainter and fainter, until at last she dissolved in tears, and the Prince was left alone.

"The next day and the next, in her peasant's garb, she followed with the people; but at night, when stillness had fallen upon the earth, and all were asleep, again, in her own robes

as Water-Princess, she appeared to the beautiful Prince, her golden hair bound with a lily garland, and her white feet slippered in crystal slippers. And each night the Prince fell more and more in love with her, and as she faded away in her tears he longed more and more that the vision might be real.

"But that could never be, so he sorrowfully left the old town, and his splendid rooms in the Palace, and returned to his art capital; but ever in his heart dwells the lovely ideal which, alas! he can never realise upon the earth.

"And the poor Water-Princess, grieving sorely, wandered about the Palace Gardens, lingering over every spot where he had been. Through the acacia avenue, on the terraces that overlooked the garden, on the high embankments, towering above the deep moat that lay between them and the glacis—up and down she paced, bringing back every look, every word, and every smile of the beautiful Prince.

"She paused where the great Virginian creeper hung its crimson, and orange, and gold, and emerald leaves in rare festoons;

lingered to watch the grapes on the old grey wall turn white and purple; and at last she sat down by the fountain, and gazed at herself in the waters of the stone-coped basin. But the continual dropping of the cascade ruffled the surface, so that only a blurred image presented itself, as if her shadow also had marred itself by weeping.

"At length, in a state of despair, she suddenly rose and lifted her arms high above her head, and threw herself into the pond, whilst the spray of the fountain fell thicker and faster. Then it rose up like a great white column, and gradually shaped itself into the figure of an ancient Water-Spirit, with hoary head and beard, who seized the affrighted Princess in his grasp.

"'And so you have come back again at last,' said he. 'But it is too late now; we do not want you. Never more shall you glide through the shining waters, or visit the crystal grottoes, or the coral islands, rich with flowers of pearl. You have lost your heart to a mortal Prince, and earth henceforward must for ever be your prison. A dungeon is prepared for you underneath the Palace where

sojourned your earth-born love; a magnificent prison, but still a prison. There must you remain until you fall in love with some other Prince.'

"'That will be never,' answered the Water-Princess, recovering from her fright, when she found that the Water-Spirit was no other than her old uncle, who had raged terribly when he found that the Queen-mother had given her permission to visit the earth.

"And so the old Water-uncle gave her into the hands of two Kobolds, who conveyed her to the halls that she now inhabits, and where everything tends to remind her of her earthborn Prince.

"And she goes on spinning and spinning the long golden thread which, if one could only untwist it, would be found to be the loveliest poem that tongue could utter or ear listen to."

Kaspar gave a sigh; for, young as he was, he understood how sad it was to be for ever shut up in a prison, however beautiful it might be, and have no one near to love or care for one.

Then again he looked at the beautiful Water-Princess who sat spinning and spin-



THE ENCHANTED PRINCESS.

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ning, with her lovely eyes gazing dreamily into vacancy, as though she were looking for , some one far away.

Still from the hall of music rose the floating strains, and then the Princess listened, for it seemed to her a message from the earth of him whom she should never see again. And yet it gave her comfort, for perchance he thought of her also.

The White Pigeon fluttered up to where the Princess was seated, and cooed gently.

But the Princess was too much absorbed to hear her.

Then she nestled close up and cooed still louder, and the Princess started. The thread dropped from her fingers. It was so long since she had touched anything living.

"Beautiful bird!" said she, stroking the Pigeon; "art thou a love-bird from the upper world? Hast thou brought me tidings of my love?"

Then Kaspar, who had been half hidden under the bird's plumage, and had instinctively taken off his cap, raised his head and spoke—

"Beautiful lady, there is one heart that

loves you in Fairyland—a Prince, most brave, most unfortunate; and he would willingly rescue you."

"But not my Prince," answered the Water-Princess.

"Let him be your Prince," urged Kaspar; "at least, grant him permission to try to set you free."

"I can grant that," replied the Princess, "for I long to be at liberty. Day after day I dream that some time an end will come to my captivity, and I shall see once more the face that haunts me yet."

Kaspar's heart sank a little, for he knew that the Squirrel Prince looked very unlike the vision that the Water-Sprite was thinking of; but still the Squirrel Prince was so good, so true, that perhaps in time the Princess might learn to love him as Beauty loved the Beast. Therefore he said—

"Will you not send some token to my master, that he may understand that it is your gracious will that he should succour you?"

The Princess considered for a while, then she broke off a piece of golden thread she was spinning, and said"Take this to him, but he must only expect my gratitude."

That was something.

And Kaspar reverently took the golden thread and kissed it, as if he had been a courtier all his life.

"We must return," whispered the Pigeon; the morn is drawing nigh."

The Water-Princess held out her hand, and Kaspar kissed it.

And he felt much more important after he had done so.

"To kiss a Princess' hand! That is indeed something," thought Kaspar.

And, musing over it, he found himself in the hall of music, before he even knew that the Pigeon had plumed her wings for flight.

At the door of the subterranean passage they found the two sentinels standing as they had left them, with their faces towards it.

The White Pigeon tapped the handle with her beak, the door sprang open, and after they had passed closed immediately behind them. Then looking through the glass she called to the sentinels—

"Right about face!"

And the sentinels turned to their former position, and thought no more of Kaspar and the Pigeon, who made their way to the water again.

The old Goldfish was waiting for them.

"You are a little behind time," said he.

"Never mind," answered the White Pigeon, we paid handsomely."

"That you certainly did," returned the Goldfish; "we have only finished a hamper and a-half, so that we have a prospect of feasting for several days."

Through the water, through the garden, through the avenue, back to Kaspar's little room.

How the blind came to be drawn again and the shutters closed, Kaspar could not imagine when he awoke in the morning. But so it was. No one would have suspected that Kaspar had been out of the room during the night.

Certainly Dorette did not.

Linda was the only one who guessed at it, and she waited eagerly to hear Kaspar's account of his night adventure.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Kaspar suddenly,

in the midst of his narration; "I have lost the piece of gold thread that the Water-Princess gave me. Where can I have put it?"

"Perhaps in your coat pocket," suggested Linda. And then Kaspar remembered that it must be in one of the pockets of his suit, and would be quite safe, for the pigeons took care of his court clothes during the day.

Linda listened attentively to Kaspar's story, and then walked across the room to where a thrush was singing in a large gilt cage. She looked significantly at Kaspar.

"I know what you are thinking of," he said; "I thought of it myself last night. It is a handsome cage, but still it is a cage, and the thrush is a prisoner."

"Perhaps the thrush is a princess."

Kaspar shook his head.

"I think not," he said; "but still the thrush may long for liberty. It is good to be free."

"But we take care of it, and give it food and water, and lumps of sugar, and even bonbons."

"Yet is it a captive," replied Kaspar.

"We shall miss its song if it is ever free," observed Linda, thoughtfully.

"We shall hear a sweeter one in our hearts," said Kaspar.

But Linda did not understand.

"When the spring comes, and the trees begin to bud," continued Kaspar, "and the warm winds blow from the south, and bring the birds home from their winter travels, then I shall take the cage into the garden, and open the cage-door. And if the thrush flies forth to join its brethren, then shall I rejoice because it has found its friends and liberty."

"But if it will not go; if it likes to stay with us?" pleaded Linda.

"Then shall we take more care of it than ever, for it will have chosen us for its friends, and we shall know that it freely sings to us its songs."

"Yes," returned Linda, after some consideration.

There was a pause.

"Kaspar." She was not thinking of the thrush now.

"Ves."

"It was not right of the gold-fishes to

betray the entrance to the underground palace, was it?"

That was something that Kaspar had not thought of.

"No, perhaps not," he replied, after a moment's thought; "but what can one expect from greedy little fishes?"





## CHAPTER V.

KASPAR'S ADVENTURE WITH THE MOTTLED PIGEON—THE SQUIRREL PRINCE'S EXPEDITION.

"WONDER which of the pigeons will come to-night," said Linda to Kaspar, as they stood at the window watching the pigeons perched on the dovecot opposite. "Which do you guess?"

"I don't know; there are four of them yet to come—the mottled, the dove-coloured, and two more white ones."

"Four nights longer! Shall you not be tired?" asked Linda.

"Tired! no. You forget that I have no walking to do. It is the most delightful thing in the world to fly!"

"Ah! but it is what one never does in the world," replied Linda with a sigh. "Is it like going in a sleigh with four horses, and the bells ringing?" she added.

"Swifter, swifter, swifter, and there are no bells. Can you imagine twenty-four antelopes, as fleet as the wind, drawing you, and never stumbling, but gliding along as a swan upon the river?"

Linda considered.

"No," she said, shaking her head, "I can't imagine it. But, Kaspar, tell me which pigeon you guess; I guess another white one."

"No," replied Kaspar, "I should say the dove-coloured one; she has been sitting alone resting herself all morning, whilst the others have done nothing but fly up and down, and fight with the fowls for the bread crumbs. I say the dove-coloured one."

But Kaspar was wrong; it was the Mottled Pigeon that awoke him—almost, it seemed to him, before he had gone to sleep.

The Mottled Pigeon was larger than the rest, and had a martial air about him. He was very strong, and had a quick way of speaking, that seemed as if he were used to command.

"Up! up!" said he to Kaspar; "the Squirrel Prince is waiting for us. Up! up!"

"Have you brought my court dress; and is the gold thread in the pocket?" asked Kaspar.

"How should I know? I have not looked."

But Kaspar looked at once, and there it was, safe enough.

He was putting on the suit as quickly as he could; but he would have been quicker if the Mottled Pigeon had not hurried him so much. As it was, he grew so nervous that he could scarcely fasten the clasps of his sword-belt; and his sword fell out of the sheath, and his plumed cap rolled under the bed.

"You are very stupid," said the Mottled Pigeon.

"I am trying to be as quick as I can," answered Kaspar; "but somehow everything seems to slip out of my fingers."

"I don't think you are awake yet," said the Pigeon.

"Oh yes, I am," replied Kaspar, giving himself a great pinch, in order to assure himself of the fact, and at the same time jumping off the bed to find his cap.

At last he was ready; and the Mottled

Pigeon, taking him on his back, away they flew.

Day again—fairy day, and pink and silver clouds were floating about in the summer sky.

Up the broad avenue, and through the Palace Garden, to the great orangery that the Squirrel Prince had made his quarters for the winter. The orange-trees were in full bloom, covered with white blossoms, and, wonderful to relate, also laden with ripe fruit; and the pomegranates that were ranged alternately with them abounded also in fruit and rich scarlet flowers.

The Squirrel Prince was seated dejectedly on his throne, and the Squirrel Courtiers were ranged around. The Lord Chancellor was, however, in some perplexity about his cashbox, and the Lord High Admiral did not know what to do with his anchor, though both were endeavouring to seem as though they were perfectly at ease, and quite masters of the situation.

When Kaspar and the Mottled Pigeon appeared, there was an immediate excitement among the Squirrels. Even the Prince, who had been leaning his head on his paw, looked

up mournfully, and said in a melancholy tone, "What cheer?"

"Take courage, your Majesty," answered Kaspar, bending his knee, and drawing from his pocket the piece of golden thread; "I have seen the Princess, and she sends you this token of her favour."

The Squirrel Prince leaped as though he had been shot; he seized the golden thread, and pressed it to his heart. Then his eyes glittered; his old spirit shone forth from them.

"Courage!" he shouted in a loud voice.
"Courage! Let us on to victory!"

There was a great waving of tails among the Squirrels, excepting the Lord Chancellor and the Admiral, who could not divest themselves of their encumbrances.

But they joined in the shout of "victory," though each had his private misgivings with regard to it, on account of the state of the fleet and of the exchequer.

After the Squirrel Prince had shouted, "Let us on to victory!" he remained silent, for he did not exactly see what steps were to be taken to accomplish it. But the Mottled Pigeon whispered to Kaspar—

- "Tell him he must get the army together and follow the Prince of Astracan."
- "I thought we were going to find the Silver Key?"
- "Obey orders," said the Mottled Pigeon peremptorily.
- "Your Majesty will please to order out the troops," said Kaspar.

The Prince looked round, but the Commander-in-chief was nowhere to be seen.

- "Where is the Commander-in-chief?" enquired the Prince, a little hastily.
- "The army has been disbanded, sire, as there was no money to keep it up," replied the Chancellor in explanation; "and the Commander-in-chief, having nothing to do, has retired into the country."

The Squirrel Prince bit his tail with vexation. But the Mottled Pigeon whispered again to Kaspar—

- "Will your Majesty call upon your subjects to volunteer?" enquired Kaspar, aloud.
  - "Certainly," replied the Squirrel Prince.
- "But there can be no bounty-money offered," observed the Lord Chancellor, dismally rattling his empty money-box.

"Is there no loyalty?" murmured the Squirrel Prince.

"Not much," remarked the Mottled Pigeon, sotto voce.

Then, turning to the Lord Chancellor-

"You are not fit to be a Lord Chancellor," said he, stirred up to speak sharply, even though in the presence of royalty. "Put the matter into my claws, your Majesty, and I'll find an army for you."

"Excellent Pigeon," responded the Prince, "I will make you my Chancellor when the war is over."

"What war?" whispered Kaspar to the Pigeon.

"Against the Prince of Astracan, to be sure. The Prince has some sense in his brains," returned the Mottled Pigeon. Then, turning to the Squirrel Prince—

"I am much obliged to your Majesty, but I don't care to entail upon myself the cares of office. Now order out your steeds and let us away."

"Alas! I have no steeds!" exclaimed the Prince in despair.

The Mottled Pigeon paused for a moment

in undisguised perplexity. Then a bright idea suggested itself to him.

"Will your Majesty object to walking a short distance?"

" No."

The Squirrel Prince was ready to do anything that would in any way further the winning of the Princess.

"Follow the Mottled Pigeon," said he to the courtiers, "and let him be your general."

So all the courtiers, with the exception of the Lord Chancellor and the Lord High Admiral, who could not by any possibility march, encumbered as they were, formed into line, and followed the Mottled Pigeon, who, with Kaspar on his back and the Squirrel Prince marching at his side, flew slowly through the garden, out upon the square, through the broad avenue, and turned to the right into the Schul-gasse, past the great Seminary, and toward the University.

"And you saw her," whispered the Squirrel Prince to Kaspar.

"Yes, your Majesty."

"And she was lovely-beautiful?"

"Beautiful! beautiful! beautiful!" answered Kaspar enthusiastically, "and very sorrowful."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Squirrel Prince, pressing the thread of gold still closer to his heart.

On went the train. Why were they going to the University? Perhaps to get the students to join them. The students would be glad enough to do it. But then Kaspar remembered that there would be no students at the University at that time, for, though it was day with the fairies, it was night to all beside—still, quiet night, when mortals were sleeping.

They entered one of the side doors and began to ascend the staircase. It was the way to the Museum. What could they want there?

On the way they met some strange-looking creatures, very bony, with curious heads and queer faces. Kaspar felt a little frightened; he did not at all like the look of them, and they seemed to be darting about everywhere.

"Only some of the spectres out of Holbein's etchings," said the Mottled Pigeon; "take no notice of them, and they will all go quietly back into the Print-Room."

And the procession mounted up until they

came to the rooms where the stuffed animals were kept. Kaspar knew them well; he had been there several times, and had wondered at the height of the Camelopard, and had shrunk half-affrighted from the Leopards and Tigers, whose great glass eyes seemed to follow him all over the room. There was one Tiger in particular that was not very well stuffed, and its body looked unnaturally long. This animal was his especial aversion, it had such a cold, cruel look about it.

To-night, to his surprise, the animals were gifted with renewed life: they were all moving about, and evidently very hungry; which was not to be wondered at, when one considered how long they had been up there without anything to eat.

A general growl rang through the room as the train of the Squirrel Prince entered, and Kaspar had fears that the ravenous wild creatures might fall upon the Prince and his followers and devour them at once.

But the Mottled Pigeon perched himself on the back of the Camelopard, which was a station of some eminence, and then in a loud trumpet-like voice called out"A truce, a truce! Let us come to a parley."

The Squirrels had followed the example of the Mottled Pigeon, and had climbed up into various places of safety; as many of them as could upon the back of the Camelopard, which, being a kindly creature, did not kick under its unusual burden, but stood twisting its long neck and head, in order to obtain a glimpse of the new-comers.

Then the beasts crowded around to hear what the Mottled Pigeon had to say, for they were glad enough of any little change to relieve the monotony of their existence, which they found very dull after the liberty they had been accustomed to in their native forests. For doubtless they missed the deep jungles, the gigantic trees, and the heat of the burning sun, and found it dreary and cold enough to be shut up in a room at the top of the University. Therefore they ceased growling, and listened attentively as the Mottled Pigeon spoke of the projected expedition against the Prince of Astracan. And when he ended by saying that he had come to see if any of them were willing to join it, a universal

shout went up, testifying to their delight in the anticipation of the chance of roaming once more over the earth, though it might not be in the lovely tropical regions to which they had been accustomed.

When the shout had subsided there was a pause. Who should be spokesman, and answer the Mottled Pigeon's proposition? The hesitation was not of long duration.

The Lion stepped forward; his flowing mane give him a venerable appearance, and resting on the tips of his ears was an old gilt crown, which seemed to have been put on in a hurry, as it stood a little on one side. This somewhat detracted from the majestic bearing that he assumed; but at the same time it gave him a convivial look that caused Kaspar to feel less afraid of him.

The King of the Beasts, in a loud tone, spoke as follows:—

"We are ready to form an alliance with our royal brother, the Squirrel Prince. We remember the Prince of Astracan with anger, our attention having been called to his misdeeds by the White Foxes, who made a special journey to our court to complain of the cruelties he practised towards them; and we are glad of an opportunity of punishing the Prince of Astracan for his tyranny towards an unoffending and loyal race."

Here the beasts began to growl again and show their teeth, and two Monkeys, who had been mimicking the action of the Lion as he waved his paw and shook his mane to give point to his speech, here turned three somersaults, and, swarming up the Camelopard's tall thin legs, stationed themselves on either side of Kaspar, and grinned amicably.

Instinctively Kaspar felt in his pockets—if he had but a nut—and lo! his pockets seemed magical ones, for he drew out a whole handful of fine filberts, which he presented to the new allies. There was an immense chattering at this unexpected result, and several monkeys who had watched the proceedings from a distance came forward to share in the benefits enjoyed by their more fortunate brethren.

And in a moment the Camelopard was scaled on all sides.

"Come down, the whole lot of you," shouted the Lion, losing his dignity in his anger;

"come down! Is the assembly to be disturbed by your follies? Come down at once."

Down dropped the Monkeys, and the Mottled Pigeon whispered to Kaspar—

"Keep your hands out of your pockets until I give you leave."

Then followed a discussion—who were to go and who were not?

Every one wished to join the expedition, but the Mottled Pigeon only wanted a limited number, therefore it was decided that he should make his choice.

The Lion of course, two Tigers, three Leopards, and a Jaguar, besides several Foxes and some Panthers, a Rhinoceros, and a large Buffalo, who had come from an adjoining apartment, and had put his head in at the door to hear the discussion. It was quite sufficient inducement for him to hear of the red Flamingoes; he hated everything red, and at once expressed his desire to join the expedition.

There was much dissatisfaction among the rejected ones; but the Mottled Pigeon was a pigeon of business, and it gave him no concern. He further chose the Camelopard, the

Zebra, and two Camels, for the purpose of carrying the Squirrel Prince and his courtiers; and, having thus arranged matters, he flew down stairs again with Kaspar, the Squirrel Prince followed on the Camelopard, and after him came the mounted courtiers and the rest of the animals in a tolerably regular procession.

Out into the narrow streets, with the fairy sun shining in the clear blue sky, though it was nigh midnight, and fairy birds darting hither and thither, singing such lovely songs that the inhabitants of the old town who were calmly sleeping through mortal night heard them in their dreams, and fancied themselves lying under the tall trees in summer-time, by quiet water-pools and banks of flowers, listening to such music as was never heard by mortal ears.

Kaspar was close at home now, and he wondered if Linda were awake and was thinking of him. Also he wondered what his father and mother and Dorette would say if they knew where he was. And he half wished that Marie and Thekla could see him riding triumphantly in front of the martial

procession, and not feeling a bit frightened, though he was going to fight a battle with the Prince of Astracan.

Through the narrow Schul-gasse, and, turning to the left through equally narrow and winding streets, they came to the wide Dom-Strasse, with the gay shops on either side. But the shops were closed now-no one was stirring in the streets; all the shutters were closed, and the great snow-heaps that were lying on either side the street during the day had melted away. All the houses were covered with garlands and flowers; such magnificent flowers Kaspar had never seen before: and thousands of butterflies were fluttering around them. He could not help thinking how much people missed by staying in bed all night, and never taking one peep out of the windows to see what was going on outside.

Still it was just possible that, if people had looked out twenty times during the night, they would not have seen what Kaspar did.

The train marched rapidly along the Dom-Strasse until they came to the large fountain which stood on the left side of the street, and then the Mottled Pigeon cried, "Halt!" and perched himself on the edge of the stone basin.

There were six Stone Dolphins round the fountain, out of whose mouths the water poured into the basin; and on stone pedestals above stood Warriors all armed for fight, as much as to say, "It is our business to see that no unworthy people come to the fountain, else shall we drive them away."

At least so Kaspar had always thought, and I am not sure that it would have surprised him if he had seen one of the stone figures leap down and chastise some of the naughty little boys who were occasionally to be seen playing round the fountain.

There were, however, no little boys there to-night—no men or women with pails or drinking-cups; all was silent, and one only heard in the calm clear air the bubbling of the water as it fell from the mouths of the six Stone Dolphins, just as it did in the day-time.

Wide open were the Dolphins' mouths; forth rushed the water. Of course it would be

impossible for them to speak with their mouths so full—at least that was Kaspar's idea, founded upon his own experience; but then Kaspar's experience was very limited, and he knew nothing whatever of the ways of Stone Dolphins.

His surprise was therefore great when he heard the Dolphin nearest to him ask in a sweet silvery tone—

"What wishes my old friend to-night?"

Kaspar, after his astonishment had somewhat subsided, remembered a line that he had learned in one of his pieces of poetry about "voices like flowing waters." He had not quite understood it at the time, but when he heard the Dolphin speak, it became clear to him at once.

"I want the waters dried up, so that we can pass through the iron grating," replied the Pigeon; "we must go by the underground railway to the Sea of Emeralds before midnight."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed a stentorian voice from above; "a fine request truly. There will be two words to say to that, Mr. Pigeon. Do you think that we are going to allow such a thing as long as we have swords at our sides?"

It was not the Dolphin who made this answer, and Kaspar, raising his eyes, saw one of the armed Warriors looking down from the upper part of the stonework of the fountain. He had a scornful expression on his countenance, but his stone eyes had no animation in them.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed again, and the other Warriors also laughed, which made a very discordant chorus to the silvery tones of the Dolphin.

The Mottled Pigeon nodded coolly to them. "We're going after the Prince of Astracan," he said.

"Ha!" and the Warrior who had spoken put his hand on his sword—so did the others.

"You had better join us," continued the Mottled Pigeon.

"We will," said the Warriors, leaping down with one impulse; "we owe the Prince a grudge, and shall be glad to wreak our vengeance upon him."

The Prince of Astracan appeared to be by no means a popular Prince. Kaspar was not



surprised at it; his behaviour to the Squirrel Prince had been very ungracious and uncourteous.

To be sure, they were both wanting the same thing, and that tries people's tempers very much. It is easy enough to be pleasant when one has one's own way.

I am not sure if these thoughts occurred to Kaspar, but they might have done, and therefore I write them down. However, to go on with the story.

"Lose no time," said the Warrior to the Dolphins; and lo! the Dolphins opened their mouths still wider, and began to swallow up the water, until every drop was drained out of the basin. Then they closed their mouths quite tight, and the basin divided into two parts, showing an iron grating in the middle, which flew open. The troop of animals, headed by the Mottled Pigeon and accompanied by the Stone Warriors, passed through, and the door closed behind them with a loud bang, that caused the arch above them to tremble as if it were about to fall down.

"No danger," said the Mottled Pigeon to

Kaspar, who certainly did not feel quite at his ease in the darkness.

"Where is the railway?" asked Kaspar.

"Puff, puff, whir——r!" sounded a great whizzing engine at no great distance.

"Oh, perhaps it won't see us and will crush us to pieces!" ejaculated Kaspar.

But just then the Mottled Pigeon, with his beak, lifted up the latch of a door that no one else could see, and there, deep down under the earth, was just such a station as one might see above ground.

There was a large waiting-room for passengers, and on one side of it was a counter covered with refreshments, to which the beasts at once crowded, and regaled themselves plentifully. Each Stone Warrior took twelve Schoppens of beer. That may seem a great deal, but you must remember how long it was since they had tasted any. Also, they helped themselves largely to sausages and Sauerkraut. It was pleasant to see them eat with such an appetite, and it evidently did them good, since they moved about less stiffly afterwards. Kaspar was not hungry, so he had time to look

about him, and to notice all that was going on.

The attendants were dressed in short red cloaks, and high peaked hats; they were queer, grotesque-looking people, and he had never seen any who looked exactly like them before. As he glanced through the glass door at the train, he perceived that all the guards, porters, and engine-drivers were dressed in the same manner, so that it was impossible to distinguish one from another

He observed to the Mottled Pigeon, who had just finished a great plate of mashed peas, that it did not seem to him a good plan to have them all dressed alike, it was likely to create confusion.

"No fear on a Troll-line," replied the Mottled Pigeon.

"Troll-line!" Kaspar pondered over the word.

"Ah! of course you don't know. These are not men that you see here below—they are Trolls, who work in the mountains; and they have made a line underground to the Sea of Emeralds."

- "I should not think there was much traffic," returned Kaspar.
- "Not for mortals," answered the Mottled Pigeon, sententiously.
- "Why are they all trembling?" enquired Kaspar.
- "Oh! at the noise we made getting through the iron grating. They thought it was thunder, and Trolls are afraid of thunder; they think, when they hear it, that Thor is coming after them."
  - "Who is Thor?"
- "Dear me, I can't tell you everything. Thor is a great king; you will learn about him at school," answered the Mottled Pigeon, impatiently.
- "Do they know about him at the University?"
- "They know everything at the University," said the Mottled Pigeon.
- "Do they?" And Kaspar thought that perhaps the Lion, or the Tiger, or the Camelopard, as he was so tall, might have heard of Thor, and he could ask them about him.

But at that moment the Mottled Pigeon

interrupted his cogitations by telling him to get out his purse, for the Troll-waiter had come to be paid.

Mechanically Kaspar put his hand into his pocket, and drew out a purse full of gold pieces. He had never seen such money before; he knew how many kreutzers made a gulden, but he had no idea how many guldens it would take to make one of these bright gold pieces.

"How many must I give?" he asked, deferentially.

"The whole purse," returned the Mottled Pigeon.

It was an easy way of solving the difficulty, still Kaspar was a boy of forethought.

"But the fares?" he remonstrated.

"Let the fares take care of themselves," replied the Pigeon, sharply.

So Kaspar presented the purse to the Troll-waiter, and the Troll-waiter conveyed it to the other Trolls, and there was a general rejoicing over it, and they shook hands with one another, and hugged and embraced, till Kaspar wondered that they liked showing their feelings so unrestrainedly before strangers.

Then the door was thrown open, and a short puffy Troll cried out—

"The Squirrel Prince's special train is ready."

Out marched the troop upon the platform. There stood the special train, and at the door of each carriage was a Troll, and at the door of the state carriage were six Trolls, with their hats off, bowing to Kaspar and the Squirrel Prince, and ready to assist them in every way.

"We must have the Lion with us," said the Mottled Pigeon.

So the Lion was ushered into the seat of honour.

"All first-class carriages, and very handsome," mused Kaspar, half aloud. "I fear it will be very expensive."

"Is every one in?" enquired the Squirrel Prince.

The Mottled Pigeon flew out to see.

There had been a little difficulty, for the Rhinoceros and Buffalo were too large and heavy for the carriages, so had been obliged to have trucks put on for them. The Camelopard feared that his legs might become

cramped, and the Camels and Zebra also preferred trucks. The rest of the animals, the Stone Warriors, and the Courtier Squirrels, jumped into the carriages, and made themselves very comfortable.

Everything now was ready for starting. The station-master appeared.

"You must pay now," said the Mottled Pigeon.

And again Kaspar, putting his hand into his wonderful pocket, drew from thence two purses, larger and heavier than the former one. He wondered he had not felt their weight before.

"Gold! gold! gold! How rich you must be!" sighed the Squirrel Prince.

"It is not mine, I only pay with it," answered Kaspar.

"Ah! then," said the Squirrel Prince, still sighing, "how rich somebody else must be!" And he sighed again to think that that somebody was not himself.

The Troll station-master was overjoyed with the gold that was given. It was more than enough to pay for half-a-dozen special trains. He wished the party good luck, and

hoped to see them again; the oftener the better.

Even Trolls are pleased to see those who can give them something; so that there is, after all, something human about Trolls.

Piff, paff—piff, paff, whir——r went the engine, and away went the train.

"It's an express," observed the Mottled Pigeon to the Lion, who appeared to be very much surprised.

"It must be a double express," said the Squirrel Prince.

"It's extra, certainly," replied the Mottled Pigeon; "Trolls work well when they are well paid. We shall soon be at our journey's end."

And so they were. After what seemed to Kaspar five minutes' rush through the longest tunnel he had ever been in, with twenty-five lights flashing in at the windows in a second, they stopped at a smaller station, where only three or four Trolls were visible, and where there was no refreshment room.

"I should have liked a cup of coffee," said the Squirrel Prince.

. But it was too late then.

"You must wait until we encamp," said the Mottled Pigeon.

Kaspar became bewildered—everything impossible seemed so easy. He made up his mind as well as he could not to be surprised, but found it extremely difficult.

"Jump out," said the Mottled Pigeon.

And Kaspar jumped out, and the Squirrel Prince jumped out, and the Lion jumped out, so did the Warriors, and the Beasts, and the Squirrel Courtiers.

The Rhinoceros slowly descended from his truck, and the Camelopard seemed very glad to stretch his legs again. The Squirrel Prince sprang on his back.

"Pocket," said the Mottled Pigeon to Kaspar, who dived into the recesses of his pockets, and brought up a great handful of silver coin.

"Scatter," said the Mottled Pigeon, indicating with a jerk of his head the Troll porters and sub-railway officials.

Handful after handful did Kaspar fling to them, and the Trolls cheered the Squirrel Prince and his train lustily as long as they were in sight. In this too the Trolls were human.

Out into the fresh air again; how pleasant it was after the close tunnel and heating lamps.

Kaspar, who had felt a little sleepy before, was now thoroughly roused as he gazed upon the beautiful scene before him.

Truly might the vast ocean that stretched far, far away be called the Sea of Emeralds, for its waves glittered with sparks of the purest green, as though one had showered precious stones upon the transparent waters. In its midst rose an island that appeared to be an impregnable fortress of white and red coral; not a sign of vegetation was to be seen upon it, and though so beautiful, it gave one the impression of utter barrenness and desolation.

"I did not know there was an ocean so near to us," said Kaspar; "I never saw its name on the map."

"Have you a fairy atlas?" enquired the Mottled Pigeon.

" No."

"Then you were not likely to find it, for this is Fairyland."

- "Oh!" said Kaspar, and he drew a long breath; then he added—
  - "And that is a desert island."
  - "Not quite."
  - "Why, who lives there?"
- "No one generally, but there are inhabitants there at the present time," replied the Mottled Pigeon, significantly.

Kaspar was just going to ask who they were, when it suddenly occurred to him.

"The Prince of Astracan?"

The Mottled Pigeon nodded his head.

Kaspar looked round.

"There are no boats or vessels of any kind about. How can we get to the island?"

"This is Fairyland," was all the answer that the Mottled Pigeon deigned to make.

Just then a faint rose-coloured cloud ascended from the island.

"Watch," said the Mottled Pigeon.

It grew larger and larger, and deeper in colour, and, as it came nearer, Kaspar could distinguish wings and heads, and long legs stretching out.

"The Flamingoes!" he exclaimed.

There was a deep roar among the beasts;

the Buffalo became frantic, and plunged and tossed up his head, and bellowed furiously. The Stone Warriors gave a shout, and the Squirrel Prince, laying his paw on the hilt of his sword, said—

"Courage! Let us on to victory!"

He did not appear to be daunted by the absence of boats or of anything else; his heart was absorbed in the one idea of overcoming the Prince of Astracan. He bound the golden thread round the hilt of his sword.

"This," said he, "has magic power. Death or victory!"

"Bravo!" said the Mottled Pigeon, approvingly.

The Squirrel Prince did not think any one had heard him, and he blushed as deeply as his brown fur would permit him to do.

As the Flamingoes approached the shore, they became suddenly aware of the army collected there, and with a loud shriek they turned with one accord and fled back to the Coral Island.

"They will give notice of our approach," said the Mottled Pigeon; "and now we must encamp for the night."

"Where?"

But scarcely had Kaspar spoken before he became aware of five stately tents, with silken hangings raised on poles of gold. The middle one was surmounted with a crown, and into this the Squirrel Prince, the Lion, the Mottled Pigeon, and Kaspar entered.

Kaspar had never seen anything so splendid before, and he began to think that war was a very pleasant pastime, especially when he saw the Lion stretch himself on a pile of velvet cushions, and the Squirrel Prince throw himself on a couch canopied with gold brocade. Refreshments were served. by whom Kaspar could not make out, as plates and flagons glided about just wherever they were wanted; and the Squirrel Prince partook of a steaming cup of coffee, with six lumps of sugar in it; so also did Kaspar, and found it the most excellent coffee he had ever tasted. Every one was attended to by the same invisible hands, and an invisible band of music played all the airs that Kaspar had heard breathed through the Hall of Music.

"The Spinning Princess knows all these tunes by heart," he whispered to the Prince.

"Ah!" responded the Prince, and he strove to beat time to the music. But it was useless: his paw dropped, his head nodded; a drowsiness came over him, lulling him into a charmed sleep, although he strove against it. Kaspar stole out of the royal tent and peeped into the other tents. The Wild Beasts were fast asleep; the Squirrel Courtiers were sleepily cracking their gilt nuts to one of Wagner's overtures, but they could scarcely resist its magic power. The Stone Warriors were draining the last draught from the silver tun containing the best Munich beer. They had stretched their stiff limbs on the soft Turkey carpet, clinking their glasses and drinking to one another, saying wearily, "A health, comrades; we have had a hard day of it." Though, as they had only come a short distance in a first-class railway carriage, Kaspar did not think that they had much to complain of.

It was plain that they too would be in as deep a sleep as the rest of the volunteer troops, and Kaspar, gazing out over the Sea of Emeralds, perceived that the Coral Island was growing dimmer and dimmer, and that a great dusky circular ball was rising from the horizon, and darkening the landscape around.

"What is that?" asked Kaspar.

"It is the sun coming up," answered the Mottled Pigeon; "it always spreads darkness in Fairyland."

Kaspar watched for a minute or two, whilst everything faded away into an indistinct mist, that grew darker, darker, darker. The Mottled Pigeon was close by, but he could not see him; he put out his hand to feel where he was.

"Mount," said the Mottled Pigeon; "dawn is breaking; we ought to be at home."

Kaspar jumped on the Pigeon's back, and clasped his arms round his throat.

How dark it was! how fast they flew! Kaspar was growing dizzy; his head swam round and round; he could remember nothing.

He must have gone fast asleep, and so have been carried home by the Mottled Pigeon; for when he awoke in the morning he found himself snug and safe in his own little bed.



## CHAPTER VI.

KASPAR'S SECOND ADVENTURE WITH THE MOTTLED PIGEON—THE BATTLE OF THE BEASTS.

"THICH was it?" whispered Linda, as soon as Kaspar came into the nursery.

"The Mottled Pigeon," he answered in the same tone.

"Then we were both wrong."

"Yes."

"What nonsense are you talking now, Kaspar?" asked Thekla. "I believe you have been in a dream ever since Christmaseve."

Kaspar looked slyly at Linda, and they smiled at one another, but he did not speak; he drank his coffee and ate his roll, but he did not think the coffee half so good as that which he had tasted at the camp; but then

Thekla was more careful with the sugar than the fairies were.

At last Kaspar and Linda were left together, and Kaspar had an opportunity of telling Linda of all the wonderful things that had happened to him.

- "There will be a battle fought to-night," said Kaspar, with a martial air.
- "Oh, Kaspar, how frightened you must feel!"
- "Not at all; there's the Lion—he's strong enough—and the two Tigers, and the three Leopards, and the Jaguar, and——"
- "Oh, Kaspar, I shan't want you to go to-night."
- "Nonsense! I shall come home safe enough, only I wish it had been the Mottled Pigeon's turn; he's the strongest, and the bravest, and a very clever bird. I believe he would do for a general, Linda," said Kaspar, gravely.

"And wear a cocked hat, and a sword, and regimentals! How droll!" laughed Linda.

But though Linda laughed, Kaspar was not far wrong, as he had an opportunity of seeing that very night, for who should awake him out of his first sleep but the Mottled Pigeon.

"You again?" said Kaspar, in surprise.

"Why yes, we left our work unfinished; the getting together of the army, and the journey, and everything put together, took longer than I expected, so I have to make another night of it. None of the others have seen anything of fighting, so they would have been of no use in the battle."

"Then we really shall have the battle to-night," said Kaspar, clapping his hands.

"Of course; here is your armour; put it on."

And Kaspar, looking round, saw beside him, not his court clothes, but a complete suit of gold chain-armour, and a gold helmet, with a long white feather in it.

He was a little perplexed at first how to get into it, but at last he succeeded; and when it was all on, he could not sufficiently admire himself. He fastened on his sword, and, besides, was furnished with a shorter one, which the Mottled Pigeon told him would be very useful when he came to close quarters with the enemy.

With quite a military air Kaspar sprang

on the back of the Mottled Pigeon. He expected that they would take the same journey as on the previous night, but he was mistaken.

"Shut your eyes whilst you count twenty, and wish yourself on the shores of the Sea of Emeralds," said the Mottled Pigeon.

Kaspar did as he was desired, and, in fact, counted thirty, so afraid was he of not doing thoroughly what he was desired to do.

He believed himself to be going up as high as the stars, and that it would be impossible ever to come down again; for the moment he began to count, they shot up like a rocket—up, up, up. Kaspar felt as if he were sitting on a humming-top.

At the end of his counting he opened his eyes, when lo! the Pigeon allowed himself to drop down in a straight line, even more rapidly than he ascended, and Kaspar found himself on the borders of the Sea of Emeralds, and the Squirrel Prince's train bivouacking around, and all in excellent spirits.

Kaspar looked over the waters at the Coral Island, which had not a vestige of life about it. Its straight rocks looked invincible, and

Kaspar wondered how even the Squirrels were ever going to scale them.

Still the Squirrel Prince passed up and down, muttering to himself, "Death or victory;" so that Kaspar saw he was quite determined on getting there in some way or other. Nevertheless, there were no vessels of any kind to be seen. Kaspar looked up and down, but not a sail, not a mast, not even a rowing-boat was visible.

"How are we to get there?" he asked of the Mottled Pigeon.

"Wings, wings, wings!" shouted the Mottled Pigeon, as though he were answering the whole army.

Kaspar at first thought the Mottled Pigeon was a little rude, but suddenly, as if in answer to the cry, the air was filled with wings of every size, that fastened themselves to the sides of the Beasts, and to the shoulders of the Stone Warriors. It gave the latter a particularly odd appearance. Kaspar thought of Mars, but still he could not imagine that Mars ever looked as they did, and he rather doubted whether the Stone Men, having so little power of muscle, would be able to use

them. The Rhinoceros, too, he had his doubts about; but as he was provided with six wings, three on either side, it was possible that he might be able to raise himself in the air. The Squirrel Prince's wings glittered with gold, and he and his Courtiers took to them at once; and the Tigers and Leopards were by no means awkward. Kaspar himself did not need any, as the Mottled Pigeon could carry him everywhere.

After a few trials, the whole troop became exceedingly expert. The Rhinoceros said it was like swimming in the air, and the Squirrels compared it to leaping from one end of the acacia avenue to the other without falling.

"This is better than vessels—sails of our own, that will carry us anywhere, and no difficulty about landing," observed the Mottled Pigeon to Kaspar.

"Much better—it will be a flying army without being routed; that is strange," said Kaspar, smiling to himself, and thinking of his history books.

"Form into phalanx," said the Mottled Pigeon, with an authoritative voice.

But as the Beasts did not know what a phalanx was, and as they seemed to be somewhat irregular in their movements, the Mottled Pigeon reconsidered his order.

"Fly straight for the Coral Island," said he, "and every one land at the point most convenient to himself."

What general, under similar circumstances, could have given a wiser order.

Then arose a great whirr of wings, as loud as if thousands of eagles were swooping through the air. The Prince of Astracan and his followers heard it, and looked through their telescopes to see what the black cloud that rose so suddenly could mean. And behold they saw a very wonderful sight.

The Buffalo went first, plunging and bellowing, as he was accustomed to do, when excited, in his native wilds, his enormous black leather wings flapping heavily in the air with the sound of a great engine. The Rhinoceros paddled along like an enormous steamboat that is too much loaded to make much headway. Still with the help of his six wings he worked himself onwards. The Camelopard had an awkward appearance, so had

the Camels, whose up-and-down motion made one think that they were going to overbalance; and the Zebra kicked rather more than was graceful. The Leopards, Tigers, and the rest of the Beasts were more elegant in their movements, and the Squirrel Prince and his Courtiers skimmed along so lightly that the Mottled Pigeon declared they could not have done better, even had they been birds from their infancy.

It was an odd sight, as you may imagine, to see all these animals flying through the air, for Beasts with wings would naturally look singular. However, I do not know that they presented a stranger appearance than the Stone Warriors, whose limbs did not move at all. They preserved a perfectly upright, stiff position, and their wings carried them along as if moved by machinery.

The Prince of Astracan was exceedingly indignant at the sight of such an incongruous army, and wondered what the Squirrel Prince could be thinking of to bring such a set of soldiers against him.

"It is an insult," said he to his followers; and they in answer yelled and grinned until

their rows of white teeth seemed quite as large as the rest of their faces; and they drew their great flashing scimitars and mounted their flamingoes.

Up rose then a crimson cloud from the island, even as the black cloud had risen from the shore. Nearer—nearer—nearer they drew towards each other, until they met half-way between the shore and the Coral Island.

The Mottled Pigeon had not calculated upon this; however, if the worst came to the worst, and they were toppled into the water, they could swim, which was more than the Astracanians could do.

But something else occurred which seemed not to have suggested itself to either party which was, that they were unable to draw up or to pause for a moment in the air, or they would have dropped into the sea below; therefore the fight in the air must be an entirely skirmishing one.

Each party, therefore, tried to force the other back; now the Black Wings (as I shall call the Squirrel Prince's army), now the Scarlet Wings had the best of it. The

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Squirrel Prince was most agile; he had already unseated two of the enemy, who, plunging into the water, were never seen again.

The Prince of Astracan, on the other hand, disabled the Camelopard and the two Camels, who, however, were more fortunate than the Astracanians, for, finding themselves wingless, and in the water, and knowing that it would be an impossibility to land on the Coral Island, wisely made use of their legs, and, swimming back to the spot whereon they had encamped on the previous evening, busied themselves in turning one of the tents into a hospital for any wounded that might be brought back.

Then they sat down upon the green turf, and watched the battle, which, in the distance, appeared to be a confused mass of tangled Scarlet and Black, with here and there bright flashes, as of lightning—this was occasioned by the swords—and hovering over the cloud, here, there, and everywhere, shone out a golden star. This was Kaspar in his golden armour, borne into the thickest of the fray by the Mottled Pigeon.

But the cloud moved farther and farther away, nearer and nearer to the Coral Island. Could it be possible? Was the Squirrel Prince indeed gaining an advantage? Yes, his troops pressed hard upon the Astracanians, who suddenly changed their tactics, and determined to retreat to their fortress, and there defend themselves against the enemy.

With a good deal of skill they gained the summit of the rocks, and there, ranging themselves in a formidable line, they awaited the approach of the Black Wings.

"Death or victory!" still shouted the brave Squirrel Prince, though he had received a severe sabre-cut across the head, and had one of his ears cut off.

And the Mottled Pigeon answered "Bravo."

And Kaspar meditated as to whether the Spinning Princess would like a Squirrel with only one ear, though he might be brave; he was afraid not. However, one can never decide such matters.

The nearer the Buffalo came to the coral rocks, the more excited he became, for they were as red as the flamingoes.

"If I can only land," said the Buffalo. But

that was not so easy, as there was a formidable array of scimitars to keep them off, and Kaspar almost despaired. One Leopard, more rash than the others, had already been hurled from the heights, and the Rhinoceros certainly would have been, had he not offered so stout a resistance, and had three pairs of wings instead of one. Two wings were, however, a good deal crushed, though otherwise he was as well as ever.

The Leopard made the best of his way homeward, where he soon found himself in very comfortable quarters.

The Beasts kept hovering on the verge of the cliffs, until a brilliant idea occurred to the Squirrel Prince. He and his Courtiers were lighter than the others, and they would rise in the air and fall upon the Astracanians from above, whilst the "heavy cavalry," as he termed the heavier Beasts, could make a sudden charge on the rocks.

Up. rose the Squirrels, headlong went the Buffalo, followed by the Beasts, and in the irresolution of the Astracanians as to which party they should engage with first, the adverse army found itself once more upon

firm land, or rather firm coral, for there was nothing to be seen but a wide plain of polished coral, that stretched for miles and miles.

"An excellent battle-plain," observed the Mottled Pigeon; "no advantages for either side—no choice of ground. We shall have a fair fight now."

And it was a fair fight for a long time, each side fighting valiantly. The Stone Warriors were evidently much relieved when they found themselves once more on solid ground, as they were utterly out of place in the air. Their rigid limbs regained their motion, and they wielded their swords and battle-axes to such purpose, that the tide of victory seemed to be turning in favour of the Squirrel Prince.

And now came the combat of the day. The Prince of Astracan and the Squirrel Prince met face to face.

"The Spinning Princess shall be mine!" shouted the Prince of Astracan, whirling his scimitar round his head.

"The Spinning Princess shall be mine!" returned the Squirrel Prince, flourishing his sword.

"Victory or death!" shouted both in chorus; and then they closed with one another.

The armies paused to see their Princes fight; they did not offer to interfere—they did not offer to save them—that would have been against their laws of chivalry. They gathered round at a respectful distance, determined to let the parties most interested have a fair field and no favour, and fight it out comfortably.

Perhaps, if armies were more in the habit of doing this, there might not be so many warlike expeditions undertaken in the world.

However this may be, the two fought until both were so exhausted that the beholders expected every moment to see them sink lifeless to the ground.

Suddenly a shout rose from the Astracanians; their Prince had forced the Squirrel Prince to the ground, and his scimitar was raised above his head. It was answered by a low, sullen growl from the Beasts; but in another moment the Squirrel Prince had leaped to his feet, and with one last effort struck off the Prince of Astracan's head, and then fell senseless on the plain.

The Astracanians were filled with dismay at the loss of their leader; they fled in every direction, and would have become an easy prey to the infuriated Beasts, had not the Mottled Pigeon commanded Kaspar to sound the bugle that was hanging round his neck. At which sound the Beasts paused, and the Mottled Pigeon cried out in a shrill voice—

"Stop the fight! I call upon the Astracanians to surrender."

Immediately the Astracanians rushed forward, and, falling upon their knees before Kaspar and the Mottled Pigeon, laid down their arms.

"What have you to say against the whole of you being thrown into the Sea of Emeralds?" asked the Mottled Pigeon.

The Astracanians hung down their heads. At length one of them ventured to say-

- "We were obliged to obey our Prince."
- "Loyalty! loyalty!" murmured the Squirrel Prince, who was recovering slowly.
- "Loyalty!" echoed Kaspar; "they could not help themselves."
- "There's something in that," said the Mottled Pigeon.

"There's a good deal in it," said the Squirrel Prince, who was coming more and more to his senses.

"Will you swear never to appear in arms again against the Squirrel Prince, if you are given your liberty and permission to return to your own country?"

"We swear," replied the Astracanians with one voice.

"Catch your flamingoes then and begone." The order had not to be repeated twice.

A shrill whistle brought the terrified flamingoes to their masters, who leaped upon their backs and fled away to their own land, there to tell of the fate of their despotic master, and to join in the acclamations that greeted his successor.

"And now," said the Mottled Pigeon, "but one thing remains to be done upon the island."

"What is that?" asked Kaspar.

"Wait and see," returned the Mottled Pigeon.

Then the Mottled Pigeon commanded the Beasts to return to the encampment, so that no one was left upon the Coral Island ex-

cepting the Squirrel Prince and the Stone Warriors.

When the army was well on its way homeward, the Mottled Pigeon turned to the Squirrel Prince—

"You are nearer finding the silver key than you imagine; the fairies led both you and the Prince of Astracan in the right direction. At the north end of the island is hidden a spear, and if we can find it, we shall be able to overcome the Ancient Grofulus, who has possession of the key."

"Most excellent Pigeon," said the Squirrel Prince, "what do I not owe to thee?"

"Nothing," replied the Mottled Pigeon; "I should not have helped you if you hadn't been worthy of it."

Then the Stone Warriors and the Squirrel Prince and Kaspar set to work, but for a long time their search was unavailing. At last Kaspar touched something that seemed to be hollow. He looked again—certainly there was something like the lid of a box. He felt carefully all over it; he pressed it, and, by good luck touching the right spring, the lid flew open, and disclosed a beautiful spear of

the brightest steel. He shouted with joy. The Squirrel Prince flew towards him.

"Found!" said the Mottled Pigeon; "if you make good use of it you will win the Spinning Princess."

The Prince was too much overcome to answer at the time, but shortly afterwards Kaspar heard him murmuring to himself—"Victory, victory, victory!"

It was evident that he had not reflected upon the loss of his ear, or the disfiguring gash across his forehead; but then he had not yet seen himself in a looking-glass.

The steel spear having been found, there was nothing to detain them longer upon the island, so the Mottled Pigeon, with Kaspar on his back, led the way over the sea to the spot where the banner of victory was waving proudly over the silken tents.

There they found a magnificent banquet set out; and upon calling over the roll it was discovered that not a single loss had been sustained. So you may imagine that they sat down with lively hearts and great elation of spirits, and felt that no expedition could have been more fortunate.

"Thus ever was it," said the Lion, "when I led my troops forth in old times in the forest."

"Thus was it," said the Stone Warriors, "when we fought in bygone days."

"Thus may it ever be for the future," hopefully said the Squirrel Prince; for he had met with misfortune, and could not revert so triumphantly to the past as the other speakers.

Possibly they might speak a little boastfully, but then there was no one to contradict them, which is a great matter in making assertions.

Kaspar, instructed by the Mottled Pigeon, then stood up, and, raising a silver goblet full of ruby wine, said—

"To the health and prosperity of His Majesty the Squirrel Prince, and may he win the Spinning Princess."

Up rose a shout in answer to the toast, and cheer after cheer greeted it from Courtiers, Squirrels, Beasts, and Stone Warriors. And the Beasts, each seizing a goblet in his right fore-paw, drained it in imitation of Kaspar and the Stone Warriors.

"Three cheers for the Mottled Pigeon,"

proposed the Squirrel Prince, when he had concluded his speech of thanks.

Every one started to his feet, and gave, not three cheers, but so many times three cheers that Kaspar grew bewildered, and felt that nothing in the multiplication table would express them.

But as the fairy night wore on the sounds of revelry decreased; and, as the darkening shades drew closer round the Coral Island and the Emerald Sea, the guests retired to their tents, and soon fell peacefully asleep.

All except Kaspar, who, clinging to the Mottled Pigeon, soared upward on his homeward way.

"Will they stay there until to-morrow?" he asked, when they had nearly reached their destination.

"No," answered the Mottled Pigeon; "fairy hands will bear them to the Troll railway, where a night-train is waiting to convey them to the Fountain Station."

"But they will be too sleepy to know where they are when they get out; besides, how can they pay their fares?"

The Mottled Pigeon nodded his head.

"I have arranged all that with the guards," he said; "there is never any difficulty when there is plenty of money at command."

So through Trolldom and Fairydom it was just the same as upon the earth, though Kaspar was not quite old enough to appreciate the fact.

However, the Beasts were safe in the Museum before morning, and the professors and students saw no change there; they were standing in their accustomed places, and if their eyes gleamed a little more fiercely than usual, it was perhaps to be accounted for by the sun shining more brightly upon them.

The Stone Warriors also were seen upon the fountain by the earliest of the early risers, and looked as stolid as ever. There might have been a chip here and there visible in their armour and shields, but then this would most likely be attributed to the stones thrown at them by some of the naughty little boys whom Kaspar saw playing round the stone basin, when the police were looking another way.

Kaspar himself was rather glad to lie down in his comfortable bed once more, and he

begged the Mottled Pigeon to close the double windows tight, and to fasten the outer shutters, so that they would not swing; and then he fell asleep and dreamed the battle all over again, so that he was able to answer Linda's questions very minutely, and tell her exactly how many thrusts and parries were made before the Squirrel Prince won the victory over the Prince of Astracan.





## CHAPTER VII.

KASPAR'S ADVENTURE WITH THE THIRD WHITE PIGEON—THE ANCIENT GROFULUS.

WONDERFUL moonlight!

Was it a real or a fairy moonlight,
Kaspar asked himself, as he opened his eyes
and saw the strange beautiful silver light in
the room.

On the bed beside him sat a White Pigeon, looking whiter than usual in the lovely light.

- "There's a snow-storm to-night," said the White Pigeon.
  - "Then it is night?" said Kaspar.
  - "Yes."
- "I thought it was always fairy day when it was night," said Kaspar, rather vaguely.
- "Fairies can have day or night just as they please," replied the White Pigeon; "and they

like the moon when there is snow upon the ground—the sun melts the snow away."

"Ah!" said Kaspar, "so it does."

"And then there could be no ice-cities and palaces, and no ice-jewels, and no frost-crowns on the fir-trees, and no ice-fringe on the larches," continued the White Pigeon. "Ah! you will see how beautiful fairy winter is to-night—all silver and pearls and sparkling diamonds. Besides, the Ice City, with its silver roofs, is a sight of itself to see."

"The Ice City?" said Kaspar, opening his eyes wide, and putting on his court suit, and a pair of white leather boots, reaching up to the knees, lined with soft white fur, and the white fur cap and the ermine cloak, that the Pigeon had brought for him. He looked as white as the White Pigeon, except for the black tails of the fairy ermines, and the little round rosy face with great grey eyes that peeped from underneath the warm fur cap.

And then they set off through the sparkling snowflakes, or what Kaspar had supposed to be snowflakes until he put on his fairy robes, and then he saw that each flake was in reality a tiny chariot, drawn by tiny swans, and driven by a tiny charioteer. Fast, fast they sped along.

"How wonderful! how beautiful!" exclaimed Kaspar, as one after another the tiny chariots whirled past, each laden with its load of shining crystals. "Is that the way the snow is brought down?"

The White Pigeon made no answer, and on they flew.

- "Where are we going?" asked Kaspar.
- "To find the Ancient Grofulus."
- "Grof—" began Kaspar, and then he paused.
- "—ulus," supplied the White Pigeon—
  "Ancient Grofulus."
  - "Why Ancient?" asked Kaspar.
  - "Because he's as old as the hills."
  - "And how old is that?"
- "Who knows?" answered the White Pigeon; "I don't."

And still the snow-chariots drove through the air; but for all that, Kaspar could see the blue sky, and the golden stars, and the silver moon, bright as he had never seen them before.

As they passed the fountain, the Stone

Warriors, who were glittering with ice-jewels, called out to them—

"Any work for us to-night?"

"I don't know," replied Kaspar, looking at the White Pigeon, who had half-turned his head as they spoke.

"Do you want any?" asked the Pigeon.

"As much as you can give us; it is dull work being stationary."

"Be quick, then, and follow us."

Down jumped the Stone Warriors, and clanked along the streets, looking as though they were clad in crystal armour; and through the snow-storm the party moved onward, until they drew nigh the bridge.

Then the Pigeon paused.

"What are we waiting for?"

"The Squirrel Prince is later than he ought to be."

"Hush! what is that?" said Kaspar. For in the distance was a sound of music, though nothing was to be seen on account of the driving snow. And pretty as the little chariots and their drivers were, Kaspar wished that they would leave off bringing snow-crystals to the earth. Surely every

blade of grass was covered now, and the firs and larches in the courtyard had been weighed down for several days past; certainly their branches would break if a much greater burden were laid upon them. Besides, he wondered that the indefatigable charioteers were not tired.

Perhaps they were, for they moved more slowly now, and there were fewer of them, and Kaspar could see still larger patches of blue sky. Yes, their work was almost over now; and, as he was thus thinking, up came the Squirrel Prince and his train. They were in excellent spirits, and had brought the court musicians with them, who blew lively and inspiriting tunes on their instruments, that echoed cheerily through the frosty air.

Yes, the snow was over now, and the icejewels were glistening on the squirrels' bushy tails, and over their brown fur coats, until one might believe that they had all been carved out of blocks of frosted silver all set with precious stones. And what was very remarkable was, that the snow did not fall off, but clung to them just as though it were a part of their dress. On they all marched, the music playing, and Kaspar and the White Pigeon at their head.

Kaspar had been to the bridge in the morning to see the ice broken up, so that the boats and barges might pass along. He had watched among the crowd assembled on each side, and had been as much interested as any one in seeing the great heaving blocks, so many feet thick, that seemed to his inexperienced eyes like icebergs on the river. He thought he should know exactly how the river looked, and he hoped it had not frozen over again, or how were they to get to the Ancient Grofulus? Certainly they might skate there, but he did not think the Stone Warriors would make graceful skaters; and as for the Squirrels, it seemed an impossibility.

Still there had been so many impossibilities.

"Oh!" he exclaimed in the midst of his reverie, for they had reached the bridge, and everything was quite unlike anything he had seen there before.

Like and unlike, that was the perplexity. There were the statues standing on either side the bridge, as they always did, and looking Far, far away, as far as the town stretched on either side, were the most brilliant illuminations; the citadel itself was lighted up, and every turret and pinnacle appeared alive with a coronet of flame. And along the banks were fireworks going off continually, or rather continuously, for the Catherine wheels went round and round in changing colours without ever stopping, and the rockets went up one after another so quickly, that Kaspar thought that all the gunpowder in Fairyland would be exhausted.

Yet a more wonderful sight awaited Kaspar, when he crossed over to the right and looked adown the river towards the steep hills, green with vines in the summer, but now all white with snow.

For as he looked over the balustrade, lo! there lay before him, in all its glory, the Ice City of which the White Pigeon had spoken!

He had forgotten all about it, and expected only to see the huge unshapely blocks that he had seen in the morning, piled up against the buttresses. But fairy masons and builders and architects had been at work, and there was a beautiful city, built as it were of thick glass, with silver roofs to all the houses, and pearls and diamonds set in wreaths of frosted silver flowers, that hung in garlands over the streets; and fairy temples, with crystal pillars and flights of crystal steps, and garlands wreathed around them; and over the houses grew white roses and jasmine and delicate white clematis; and tall white lilies were ranged in rows along the terraces—only white flowers.

Kaspar stared in amazement. Never had he even dreamed of anything so beautiful, and in our dreams we see strange lovely sights that only the soul has eyes to see.

Yes, there in the middle of the river rose the stately city, gleaming and glimmering with a thousand rainbow tints—now rose, now purple, now emerald, now ruby, now gold. Like a city of jewels shone the Ice City, with the light of the opal lamps flashing upon it, and the calm moon and the million golden stars shining down from the clear blue heavens.

How Kaspar wished that Linda could see it too.

But the White Pigeon exclaimed suddenly, "Make haste, or it will go without us."

Kaspar looked round to see what the Pigeon meant. But, behold, it was of the city itself that he had spoken. It heaved gently, and began to glide away.

Before Kaspar could think his next thought he was in the air, and the next second had alighted with the White Pigeon on the middle tower of the principal palace in the Ice City.

Following the example of their leader, the Squirrels leaped from the bridge, and alighted safely in the great Crystal Square, as also did the Stone Warriors, without doing any damage, which rather surprised Kaspar, as he knew they were somewhat heavy. However, they seemed lighter to-night, and their silver armour was quite in keeping with the marvellous city.

- "Are there no inhabitants?" asked Kaspar.
- "None."
- "What a pity!"
- "Oh, there will be plenty in time. The city is built for the King of the North Pole, and it is going out to him, so I thought it

was as well to take advantage of it, as it will pass the cavern of the Ancient Grofulus."

"Oh---!"

Kaspar was too much astonished to say anything else for a long time. At last he enquired—

"How does it get there?"

"It turns into the Rhine and out by Rotterdam into the German Ocean. The Loreleys and Water-sprites take care of it, and help it along."

"Oh!" said Kaspar again; and again he was silent.

How well he knew each side of the river, though he had never seen it look as it did with these brilliant illuminations. Even the Convent, that rose dark and solemn in the moonlight, was brightly lighted up tonight. Of course the nuns knew nothing about it—they were fast asleep in their cells. It was all fairy work, and no mortal but himself had ever seen it. He was glad that he had been kind to the seven pigeons. No one can ever tell how kindness, even to the most insignificant, may meet with its reward.

On the opposite side of the river, over the

place where the poor nun was buried alive, years and years ago, there was a beautiful star. Perhaps the fairies had been sorry for her. Kaspar was, and he gave a little sigh.

They floated on for about a mile beyond the Convent, and then the river grew less familiar to Kaspar, and great rocks rose up, that he had not seen in the day-time.

And now the White Pigeon kept watch on the topmost tower alone, whilst Kaspar and the Squirrel Prince, and their companions, were feasting in the grand hall of the Royal Palace, where everything was made of the purest crystal. Where the repast came from Kaspar could not tell; it was served by invisible hands, as the banquet in the tents had been.

Presently the White Pigeon cooed three times, which was the signal that had been agreed upon, and up started the revellers and hastened to see what was the matter.

The Palace overhung the water, and alongside of it Kaspar saw a roughly-made raft of pine logs, with a Troll guiding it.

The Ice City stopped.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Jump on the raft," said the White Pigeon.

When they were all safely on board, the Ice City moved off again. There was a white flag flying on the Palace tower, with a motto upon it, but Kaspar could not make out the words, which was not to be wondered at, since they were in the language of the King of the North Pole.

"Good speed!" exclaimed Kaspar involuntarily, thinking of the city's long journey.

"Good speed!" shouted the rest of the party so heartily, that the words echoed from rock to rock like the report of artillery.

And, at the sound, a panel in one of the rocks opened, and a strange head peered out, and a gruff voice growled—

"What's the matter?"

The head was partly that of a man, partly of an animal. It had but one eye in the middle of the forehead, and over that eye a dog's ear stood straight up. The nose was Roman, of the most decided type; and a pair of spectacles, or perhaps half-a-pair, since there was but one eye, was balanced oddly on the bridge of it. The eyeglass was green, which contrasted strongly with the red hue of the nose. The mouth was wide.

and full of teeth; the head and throat covered with soft brown fur, and the cheeks with great bristly whiskers.

- "What is it?" asked Kaspar.
- "The Ancient Grofulus."

Kaspar looked again, for the face was still staring out. Though it had but one eye, and that shaded by a green glass, yet there was a good deal of expression in it, more than a great many people can put into two; and the expression was decidedly unfavourable to the party on the raft. The face was peering round, so as to get a last look at the Ice City, as it glided in its quivering beauty down the tide. Thus the ear was thrown a little on one side, and the mouth screwed up in an odd and uncomfortable manner, whilst the great Roman nose looked like an enormous beak. Altogether, in spite of the fierce expression of the eye, there was something so comical in the face that Kaspar burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded the head, righting itself, and growling angrily at Kaspar, whilst the whiskers stood out at least half-a-yard on either side.



THE ANCIENT GROFULUS.



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Naturally Kaspar felt a little frightened, but he did not like to show it before the Squirrel Prince. However, he made no reply, which was perhaps the wisest thing he could do under the circumstances, as the Ancient Grofulus was quite too angry to take any notice of anything he might say.

"What's the matter?" again asked the Ancient Grofulus. And as he addressed the remark to no one in particular, the White Pigeon took upon himself to reply.

"We are a party of adventurers in search of the Silver Key that opens the Palace of the Spinning Princess, and have come to ask you to guide us to the spot where we may find it."

"Then you've come upon a bootless errand," replied the Ancient Grofulus, closing the panel with a great bang that shook the rock, and made the river heave and quake, till Kaspar thought that the Stone Warriors would roll off the raft. However, they did not.

"You shouldn't have laughed," said the White Pigeon; "it wasn't polite."

"I know that," replied Kaspar, "but I couldn't help it."

"Perhaps not," murmured the White Pigeon; "however, we must get into the cave in some way or other."

"Are there any more Ancient Grofulusses?" asked Kaspar.

"Grofuli," said the White Pigeon, in correction; "it's a Latin word."

"Yes," said Kaspar, reflectively, "second declension."

"But there's only one Grofulus, so there is no plural wanted."

"Ah!" returned Kaspar, thinking it might possibly be a defective noun, but not liking to ask.

"We must get up to the panel," said the White Pigeon; "and when the Ancient Grofulus opens it again, we must force an entrance."

The Squirrel Prince and his Courtiers leaped lightly ashore; to them the scaling of the rock presented but little difficulty. To the Stone Warriors it was a matter of some labour, as their joints were stiff and cramped, but they managed to accomplish it. As for Kaspar, on the back of the White Pigeon, it was no trouble at all to him. And so it came to pass that they formed themselves

into a compact body, as near the panel as possible, waiting for it to open again. They did not wait long; the panel opened a very little way, and a head peeped out, but popped in again, and the panel closed before they had time to spring forward.

It was not the Ancient Grofulus this time, but a fox, that had looked out. He had a sharp pert nose, and cunning eyes, that winked and twinkled at the sight of the war party.

Closer the Squirrel Prince pressed.

"I can hear a scuffling inside," he said.

"What is it like?" asked Kaspar.

"Wings."

"Wings! Are there birds inside?"

"The Ancient Grofulus has wings," observed the White Pigeon, "and claws, and paws, and a serpent's tail. He is part bird, part beast, part serpent, part man."

"He must be altogether uncommonly ugly," said one of the Stone Warriors.

"He is," rejoined the White Pigeon; "but if he's flying he'll be up again in a moment, so make ready."

And hardly had he spoken before the

panel flew wide open, and the Ancient Grofulus, in a great rage, looked out again.

"What-" he was beginning; but the White Pigeon crying out, "Charge!" flew suddenly at the nose of the Ancient Grofulus, who was so taken by surprise at the unexpected attack that he fell back a little, which gave the Squirrel Prince and his Courtiers, and the Stone Warriors, an opportunity of tumbling in at the opening, and further tumbling a considerable distance to the floor of the cavern. It was a great mercy that the Stone Warriors were not broken into bits. they came down with such a crash; but they fortunately escaped uninjured, being made of very hard stone. Kaspar supposed it was adamant, and he thought some time he would ask the White Pigeon about it.

No sooner were they all in than the panel closed with a bang as before, and the noise resounded through the cavern like thunder. It was well that the Troll was not there, but had been left outside to take care of the raft. However, the Troll heard enough of it to feel alarmed, and believing that something dreadful must have hap-

pened to his late passengers, he betook himself to his oars, and made the best of his way home.

When Kaspar's eyes were in a measure accustomed to the darkness, he began to take notice of all around him, and he very much doubted whether they had done wisely in thus imprisoning themselves in the fortress of the enemy.

The Ancient Grofulus was leaning against the opposite wall, apparently too much overcome by surprise to make up his mind as to how he intended to act.

He was, as the White Pigeon had insinuated, the most nondescript creature that could well be imagined. Sometimes, when he stood upon his hind legs, with his wings spread and his tail coiling on the ground, he looked like the dragon that fought with St. George. Sometimes, when he folded his wings, and went on all-fours, he appeared to be some strange animal, between a monkey and a panther. When he flew, he looked like a combination of a horned owl and a gigantic bat. And now, as he stood with his forepaws in a deprecating attitude, and his head

slightly bent, he looked more like a praying Mantis than anything else.

The only other inhabitant of the cavern was a Fox, who appeared to be a sort of servant to the Ancient Grofulus, and who now stood up on his hind legs in imitation of his master, and kept a sharp look-out on the movements of the White Pigeon and his party. Moreover, he cast rather a hungry glance at the Pigeon, as if so fine a bird had not been thrown in his way for many a day, and doubtless he looked forward to making a delicious meal of him.

"And now you've got in, how are you going to get out again?" were the first words the Ancient Grofulus spoke.

He had recovered from his surprise, and was strutting about, flapping his wings and lashing his tail. He was evidently very strong. What if he should coil his tail round the whole party, and crush them to death in its folds?

"We have no desire to get out," returned the White Pigeon, "until we have transacted the business with you that we came about. We came for that especial purpose." "The only business that I shall transact with you will be to roast the whole lot of you for supper to-night."

"I fear you will find us a heavy meal," responded the White Pigeon, quietly.

"We shall see," responded the Ancient Grofulus. "Nickel, light the fire."

Nickel was the Fox, and in obedience to the command he dragged a quantity of wood out of a corner of the cave, and, heaping it upon a great hearth, set it on fire, and, taking down a pair of bellows that hung upon the wall, sat down gravely in front of the fireplace and began to blow away, as one well accustomed to such work.

"Puff, puff—wheeze, wheeze!" What a smoke there was! no one could see anything but now and then a lurid flame, that, dying away, left the cavern with the clouds of smoke darker than it was before.

"A strange way of making a fire," thought Kaspar; but, at the same time, he began to feel it very warm.

Drip, drip, drip, drip. Something was falling on the ground like rain.

"Our silver armour is melting away," said the Stone Warriors.

"Our silver coats are melting," said the Squirrels.

"They are all turning into water, and the water's boiling," said the Stone Warriors, hopping first on one leg, then on the other.

"Our paws will be scalded," shrieked the Squirrels.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the Ancient Grofulus; "blow away, Nickel."

But Nickel was tired, he had blown longer than usual; and it must have been hotter in front of the fire than it was at a distance, and certainly that was undesirable. So he laid down the bellows for a moment; and no sooner had he done so, than the clouds of smoke rushed up the aperture that served for a chimney, leaving the atmosphere quite clear.

Then Kaspar saw what a raging fire there was, large enough to last for a week or more, and that the walls of the chimney, the hearth, the great saucepan, the gridiron, and even the bellows, were red-hot. Stranger still, the Fox himself was red-hot, as if he had been

made of glowing embers. So was the Ancient Grofulus as red-hot as molten iron, and, what was more, he seemed to enjoy it.

"We know how to warm ourselves these winter nights," he said, as Kaspar, the Squirrels, and the Stone Warriors stood panting and gasping and stifling in the great heat.

For now the walls of the cavern were beginning to heat through, and they would soon find themselves in a great fiery oven, which did not seem to affect the Ancient Grofulus, or Nickel the Fox, in the least.

"Lay out the table, Nickel; two trenchers, one for thee and one for me. We will sup together to-night. Roast Squirrel is not bad, with a relish of pigeon."

"This is dreadful," whispered Kaspar, shuddering, as he clung to the White Pigeon.

"Take it coolly," replied the bird.

"How can I? It is getting hotter every minute," said Kaspar.

"Put your hand in your pocket," whispered the Pigeon, "and open the bottle you will find in it. Sprinkle a few drops on the ground, but don't let the Grofulus see you." Kaspar did as he was desired.

"How do you find yourselves?" enquired the Ancient Grofulus, sarcastically.

"Very comfortable indeed," exclaimed the war-party in a breath; "it's not half as hot as it was. It is getting deliciously cool."

For the magic mixture that Kaspar had sprinkled was counteracting the effects of the fire.

"Hey! what! not hot enough?" said the Grofulus, in surprise; "blow away again, Nickel."

So Nickel sat down in front of the fire, and began to blow away again, and to raise the great black clouds.

"Empty the bottle," whispered the White Pigeon.

And as Kaspar did so a tremendous explosion took place, and Nickel was blown straight up the chimney.

"It's something chemical, electrical, and pyrotechnic," said the White Pigeon aside; "two adverse elements causing an unexpected result."

"Ah!" replied Kaspar, gravely, for the White Pigeon's speech sounded very scientific.

"Who are you?" asked the Ancient Grofulus, in some surprise.

"Those upon whom you won't sup tonight," returned the Pigeon.

The explosion appeared to have produced a cooling effect upon everything. The Ancient Grofulus from a red-heat was subsiding into mild orange, though sparks were still emitted from his bristly whiskers. Kaspar thought he must be made of asbestos. The walls cooled down, so did the saucepan and the bellows; and the fire only gave out a genial heat, which was exceedingly pleasant on a chilly night.

"Who are you?" again demanded the Grofulus, becoming cooler and cooler, and appearing in his natural colours, with his wings laid glossily back, and his sleek tail twisting into folds as he sat down close by the hearth.

"Draw near and I will listen to you," said he, taking out a great pipe, and indicating by a wave of his paw that Kaspar might approach.

"Don't be afraid," said the Pigeon; "tell him the whole story."

Which Kaspar did.

When he came to the end, and mentioned the death of the Prince of Astracan, the Grofulus started up—

- "He was my ally," said he.
- "Birds of a feather flock together," suggested one of the Warriors aside.
  - "But he is dead," replied Kaspar.
- "Yes," said the Ancient Grofulus, "and I mourn him. Many is the jovial night we have spent together. Had I known that he was in want of the Silver Key, it should have been his. But I never thought that he would wish to marry a foolish Spinning Princess."

The Squirrel Prince put his hand on the hilt of his sword, but the White Pigeon bade him be quiet.

- "Since the Prince of Astracan is dead," said Kaspar, "you may as well tell us the secret."
- "Never," replied the Ancient Grofulus, fiercely; "no, I will revenge myself upon his enemies."

And with that he opened his mouth wide, and gnashed with his teeth, and Kaspar started back in affright, for, small as he had

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grown, he would have made an easy mouthful. At the same time, the Grofulus, dexterously whisking his tail, made a furious onset on the Squirrel Prince and his train, and knocked down half-a-dozen Courtiers at a blow. He had just spread out his claws to fasten them in the Squirrel Prince, when luckily the Prince remembered the steel spear, that had fallen on the ground in the confusion. He hastily tore off its covering, and putting himself in an attitude of defence, he pointed it at the eye of the Ancient Grofulus.

Singular to relate, the Grofulus shrank and shrank, until he became no larger than a lizard; indeed he did not look unlike one, excepting for his Roman nose and green spectacles.

And then, in a small weak voice, and in an abject manner, he begged for mercy.

"On one condition only," said Kaspar, who had recovered his bravery; "show us the spot where the Silver Key is hidden."

"Alas!" said the Ancient Grofulus, "that I cannot do, for I am unable to leave the cavern. If my faithful Nickel had not been blown up the chimney, you might have

taken him for a guide. All that I can now do is to tell you where it is; but unless the Crimson Lily is in flower, I fear that you will be unable to find it."

"Why can't you leave the cavern?" asked Kaspar.

"Because the hill would fall down if I did. I've lived here ever since it was a hill, and we must both go together. And if the hill fell, you and your whole party would be buried under it, and that would not be pleasant.

"No," answered Kaspar, looking a little perplexed. Then he remembered what the White Pigeon had said about the Grofulus being as old as the hills, and this seemed a sort of explanation of it. Still it was no help in the present difficulty.

"If Nickel is wanted," said the White Pigeon, "we can soon have him back again."
"How?"

"Throw the empty bottle up the chimney."

Which was no sooner done than down tumbled Nickel, all covered with soot, and looking very much ashamed of himself. He looked round for the Ancient Grofulus, but evidently did not recognise him.

- "Here I am, Nickel," said the crestfallen Grofulus, from the corner.
- "Is that you?" asked the Fox, scrutinising his once despotic master keenly.
  - " It is."
- "What do you want me for?" asked Nickel, in scarcely so respectful a tone as usual.
- "To do his bidding," said the White Pigeon, authoritatively, "and ours too. Remember we are masters now."
- "You are to take the Prince and all his train to the Valley of Sapphires, and there show them where the Silver Key is hidden at the foot of the Ever-flowering Elder. You know the place better than I do, for you have seen it; I have only heard of it."
- "And when Nickel returns to tell you that it is found," said the White Pigeon, "he will find you as large as ever, and you will have our best wishes for your good health as long as the hill lasts."
- "That will be for ever, will it not?" whispered Kaspar.
- "Who knows, in these days of railways! I can't say," returned the White Pigeon.

And this speech was the last thing that Kaspar could remember when he awoke in the morning.

"I don't remember finding the Silver Key," he said, rubbing his eyes; "the Pigeon must have brought me home whilst the others searched for it."

And he was very silent whilst Dorette dressed him.

"Have you not had sleep enough?" she asked.

"Oh yes, too much," he answered, still thinking that he must have missed the Valley of Sapphires.

But he was comforted when he had told his perplexities to Linda.

"It would have been too much to do in one night," she said, after she had pondered over the matter. "I dare say you will go to the Valley of Sapphires to-night, and find the Silver Key.

"I hope so," replied Kaspar.

"Of course you will, or how is the Palace door to be opened, and the Prince find the Spinning Princess?"

"She is so beautiful, Linda-more beautiful

than any of your dolls—more beautiful even than the Sugar-fairy. I wish the Squirrel Prince were not a Squirrel."

"So do I."

"And now he has one of his ears cut off, and a great gash across his forehead. I am afraid that the Spinning Princess will not care for him."

"Perhaps he will change into a real Prince if she does," suggested Linda. "Perhaps he will tell her to cut off his head, as the Beast told Beauty to do; and then, when she has done that, there will be no Squirrel to be seen, but only a Prince with a crown upon his head, and a long velvet cloak lined with ermine."

"I don't know," sighed Kaspar. "I hope it may be so."





## CHAPTER VIII.

KASPAR'S ADVENTURE WITH THE DOVE-COLOURED PIGEON—THE FINDING OF THE SILYER KEY.

"O it is you to-night," said Kaspar, stroking the head of the Dove-coloured Pigeon. He felt a little disappointed, for he had half expected to see the third White Pigeon again.

"I understand all about Nickel and the Ancient Grofulus," answered the Pigeon, who possibly noticed symptoms of dissatisfaction in Kaspar's voice.

"Then we are going to search for the Silver Key?"

"Of course," replied the Dove-coloured Pigeon; "the Squirrel Prince won't set off until we arrive at the cavern."

" How shall we go?"

"Fly there, of course."

The same white boots, the same ermine

cloak and fur cap; for it was a cold night, though there was no snow-storm.

The sky was clear, and dotted with innumerable stars; and away flew Kaspar and the White Pigeon over the Julius Hospital, and over the hills by the river-side, and away to the rocks with the sliding panel.

The sliding panel was opened the moment the Dove-coloured Pigeon tapped at it, and he flew in with Kaspar.

There was a cheerful fire on the hearth, and in front of it sat the shrunken Grofulus and the Squirrel Prince in earnest conversation.

On one side were the Squirrel Courtiers, and on the other, stretched at full length, lay Nickel the Fox. The Stone Warriors were not there; they had been obliged to return to the fountain, as there was to be a torch-light procession through the town, and they would be missed.

"However, we don't need their services tonight," said the Squirrel Prince, "as there is no fighting to be done."

"The sooner we set off the better," remarked the Dove-coloured Pigeon. The Ancient Grofulus put out his fore-paw. "Good-bye," said he to the Squirrel Prince. "You're the first enemy I ever made a friend of; but you're a pleasant fellow, and I wish you good luck with the——" (he was going to say "foolish," but stopped) "with the Spinning Princess."

"So do I," echoed Kaspar in his heart; but his heart misgave him when he looked at the Squirrel, with one ear off, and his beautiful fur all singed with the heat of the previous evening.

"Be off, Nickel," said the Ancient Grofulus, giving the Fox a whisk with his feeble tail, which made no impression on Nickel, who did not stir.

"Get up, Nickel!" shouted the Grofulus at the top of his weakened voice.

But it sounded only like a little piping cry, and Nickel pretended not to hear him.

"He has no respect for me now," wailed the Ancient Grofulus, "and he'll never come back to me, and I shall never hear if you've found the Key; so I shall have to remain as small as a lizard for ever and ever, as long as the hill lasts." "We will see about that," replied the Dovecoloured Pigeon, giving Nickel so sharp a peck on the nose that he sprang up with a howl.

"You must obey orders," said the Dovecoloured Pigeon; "lead the way."

The Fox looked a little sulky, but moved at once towards the opposite side of the cavern.

"I can go with you as far as the outlet," said the Ancient Grofulus; and lighting three torches, he gave one to Kaspar, one to the Squirrel Prince, and kept the third himself, and the party marched slowly through the damp subterranean passage that led to the daylight, or rather moonlight, for the fairy moon was at the full.

"And you will be sure to send Nickel back to me; I couldn't live without Nickel," said the Grofulus; "and he'll be all right when I am myself again. You know it always makes a difference when one goes down in the world, even in the best-regulated society."

And he appealed to Kaspar, who, not understanding the latter part of the sentence, made no reply. However, the Dove-coloured Pigeon responded, "Yes," in a very emphatic manner, adding, after a short pause—

"Certainly Nickel shall return to you."

They were at the end of the passage now, and through the arched opening could see the moon shining. The Grofulus did not dare to come any further, but wished them "goodbye," and shook hands, or rather paws, very affectionately with the Squirrel Prince.

The party marched along between the rocks in silence, and presently several great Eagles swooped through the air, uttering wild cries.

The Squirrel Courtiers were evidently not comfortable, and the Squirrel Prince anxiously watched the movements of the enemy. Kaspar felt decidedly alarmed; he did not know that there were Eagles living in this part of the country; but, for the matter of that, he knew nothing about the Valley of Sapphires.

"I don't like the Eagles," he said to the Dove-coloured Pigeon.

"They're not always safe," answered the Pigeon coolly.

Which was not altogether consoling.

Soon the Eagles began to fly round and round in great circles, gradually drawing nearer and nearer.

- "What are they doing?" asked Kaspar.
- "They're going to make a swoop; do you see any lambs or kids about?"
- "No," answered Kaspar, and he felt intensely miserable, for he had read a story of some Eagles who had carried off a little boy as food for their young ones.
- "Oh!" he shrieked, for at that moment a heavy black body with flapping wings brushed past, and, seizing the Squirrel Prince, soared with him aloft.

Then up shot the Dove-coloured Pigeon, like an arrow from a strong bow. Up, up! The earth looked so far down that he did not dare to take a second glance, it made him feel so dizzy. Everything was so small and so far away—the citadel, and the great palace, and the cathedral, and the bridge—they were but as toy-buildings to him as he mounted up after the Eagle.

Now they got into the clouds, and then Kaspar could see nothing. And more than

once he half-wished himself at home, and felt that Eagle-hunting was a very dangerous pastime, and he was rather glad that he was not a fairy.

Still fairies never came to any harm, and the Pigeon was a fairy Pigeon; and as that thought came into his mind he felt a little braver, but only a very little, for they were very near the Eagle now, and the Squirrel Prince looked smaller than a mouse in his clutches, and was crying out, "Help! help!" with all his might. Though it seemed a hopeless thing to expect help up there in the air with no one to hear him.

"Draw out your short sword," said the Dove-coloured Pigeon to Kaspar. They were on a level with the Eagle now, and he turned his great, fierce, blazing eyes upon Kaspar, who was almost dazzled by them.

"Plunge the sword into his throat," said the Dove-coloured Pigeon, flying straight at the great eyes as though they had been but glow-worms.

How Kaspar ever managed to do it he did not know, for he felt quite faint the moment after. He had struck wildly at the Eagle's neck, and it seemed as though he were striking a bar of iron. The shock almost knocked him off the Pigeon's back. And now he clung to the Pigeon as tightly as he could, for he felt very dizzy indeed, since the Dove-coloured Pigeon and the Eagle seemed to be tumbling over and over, and great sparks flew out on every side. It was as if a balloon full of fireworks had gone up and exploded, and Kaspar was coming down in a shower of rockets, blue lights, Catherine wheels, Jacks-in-boxes, and squibs innumerable.

Presently there was a great crash; they had alighted somewhere, but where Kaspar did not at first perceive.

But when what appeared to be the last rocket went off, and the air cleared a little, Kaspar found himself standing panting by the side of the Dove-coloured Pigeon, whilst a great heap of greyish-brown feathers was lying on the ground.

"The remains of the Eagle," observed the Dove-coloured Pigeon—"all his electricity gone."

"Anotherscientific Pigeon," thought Kaspar, feeling very respectful.

"Puff, puff, puff!" and the Dove-coloured Pigeon blew upon the feathers vigorously, and lo! as they floated into the air they turned into splendid butterflies, with purple and scarlet and golden wings, all shining with a brilliant light that lighted up the transparent rocks around, and fluttered about the flowers, until it seemed as though the stars had fallen from the skies, and were playing at hide-and-seek among the lilies and roses.

And the rocks on which the flowers grew were like to the purest blue crystal. Yes; by good fortune, or by fairy fortune, they had tumbled into the Valley of Sapphires!

How beautiful it was, lighted up by the magnificent butterflies, that glided through the air, or hid themselves for a moment in the thick foliage, or rested on the edges of the rocks, or hovered over the glassy pools in which their lovely colours were reflected, and from whose margins splendid green dragonflies rose up to meet them, and the air seemed all beset with flashing jewels.

But where was Nickel the Fox? and where were the Squirrel Courtiers?

"They ought to have arrived at the south

end of the valley by this time," said the Dove-coloured Pigeon; "we had better look out for them."

"But they may be all killed," suggested Kaspar, in a low tone; "the other Eagles——"

"Oh! the other Eagles flew away," replied the Pigeon; "only one strikes at a time."

"Will they come back?"

"No; they never come near the Valley of Sapphires."

"Why?"

"They dare not-the fairies own it."

"Hark! what is that?"

It was a shout of joy from the Squirrel Courtiers, who, entering the valley under the guidance of Nickel, saw, on a rising mound of greenest turf, their Prince, Kaspar, and the Dove-coloured Pigeon, safe and unhurt.

Kaspar ran to meet them. But there was no time to relate what had happened; they must set to work to search for the Silver Key without delay.

Through the valley, all radiant with the loveliest flowers—flowers that bloom only in the warmest climes, but that here blossomed in the wildest luxuriance—they wandered, in

order to find the Ever-flowering Elder of which the Grofulus had spoken.

Kaspar found it at last! Such an Elderbush! so tall, so full of delicate bloom and glossy leaf! He stood for some moments in admiration. Somehow he had always thought that Elder-flowers must belong to the fairies, and now he was quite sure of it. A cloud of golden butterflies hovered around it, and in the glowing light the fragile blossoms quivered in fresh beauty.

Then Kaspar remembered that the Ancient Grofulus had said that there would be no difficulty in finding the Silver Key if the Crimson Lily were in flower.

But, alas! there was no Crimson Lily to be seen; so he called to Nickel, and Nickel came up, and snuffed carefully round the White Elder-bush three times. Then he stopped, and began to scratch.

He scratched away for some time, but apparently without success.

"That can't be the right place," said Kaspar.

"Yes, it is," returned the Fox abruptly, and scratched away more vigorously than ever.

The Squirrel Prince and his Courtiers had

now come up, and were standing around in anxious expectation. The Squirrel Prince became much agitated, and twice took out his cambric pocket-handkerchief. The Dove-coloured Pigeon perched upon the topmost branch of the Elder, and whistled one of Wagner's most intricate airs. Possibly he felt it in keeping with the difficulties of the situation. At any rate, it was an association with the Spinning Princess, and so the Squirrel Prince felt it. He remembered having heard the air proceed from the Hall of Music, and it produced a soothing effect upon him.

And the Fox scratched on.

The soil must have been very sandy, for suddenly uprose a cloud as if a simoom were blowing, and Nickel was whirled to some distance. And when the cloud had cleared away, a beautiful Crimson Lily-bud reared its head in the moonlight.

The Dove-coloured Pigeon flew down.

"Approach," said he to the Squirrel Prince, "and touch the bud."

The Prince advanced. With one paw he gently touched the half-closed Lily, and behold its petals sprang apart, and on one of its

golden stamens hung a Silver Key—so tiny a key, that Kaspar wondered how it was ever going to open the great door of the palace.

"Found!" said the Dove-coloured Pigeon.

The Squirrel Prince wept for joy, then laughed, and finally, seizing the Silver Key, pressed it to his heart.

And as he held it in a tight clasp, it grew, and grew, and grew, larger, larger, until there was not a door in the mightiest stronghold that it would not have opened.

And Kaspar's mind was set at rest, for he was quite satisfied now that it was the right key, and that the Prince would marry the Spinning Princess.

But still he could not help wishing that the Squirrel Prince had not had his ear cut off, and that his forehead was not obliged to be all plastered up. What would the Princess think of him?

Still the Squirrel Prince had taken a great deal of pains to win her. But people don't always care for that. Sometimes it makes no impression at all.

Kaspar sighed aloud.

"Why do you sigh in this beautiful valley?"

asked the Pigeon. "Do you not rejoice that the Key is found?"

"Yes."

"What is it, then?"

And Kaspar told the Dove-coloured Pigeon all his fears.

The Dove-coloured Pigeon laughed softly, and said—

"The Squirrel Prince has become a mighty Prince through his adventures. All Fairyland will rise to give him wedding gifts. There will be no monarch near whose treasury will be so well filled as his; no monarch whose palaces are magnificent as his; no monarch whose lands are rich as his, or whose fleets bring in such wealth from foreign climes. Happy will the Princess be who is the wife of so great a Prince as he."

"But he has only one ear," reiterated Kaspar, recurring to his great difficulty.

"Beauty is but skin deep," answered the Dove-coloured Pigeon.

But Kaspar, though he had often heard the saying, did not understand it. He hesitated for an answer, and the Dove-coloured Pigeon went on—

- "Hasn't he a brave true heart?"
- "Yes. But then he is only a Squirrel."

The Dove-coloured Pigeon did not reply, but in his heart he said—

"So goes it in the world."

By this time the party had nearly regained the outlet of the Valley of Sapphires, and, as they neared it, Kaspar turned round to take a last look at the deep blue rocks, festooned with roses, jasmines, fuchsias, and trailing wreaths of passion-flower, amidst which the gay-winged butterflies fluttered like living flowers of even more brilliant beauty.

Such a scene could only be seen in Fairy-land, and the changing light—now rose, now blue, now ruby, now silver—cast everything into hues and shades that none but fairies can imagine.

But he had not long to gaze, for Nickel was trotting swiftly on in front, and they were obliged to follow, since the Dovecoloured Pigeon had given his word that Nickel should return to his old master.

And so he did; and by the firelight in the cave he told the Grofulus how the Key had been found. And then the Ancient Grofulus

began to swell and swell until he came to his former size again. And his eye was as expressive as ever, and he looked through the green glass at Nickel, and said—

"Nickel, you and I will turn over a new leaf to-morrow."

And it is to be hoped that they did, for their life had not hitherto been very exemplary.

As for the Squirrel Prince and his train, and the White Pigeon and Kaspar, they were all safe at home before the Ancient Grofulus and Nickel had finished their supper.

Kaspar was very tired, so one cannot be surprised that he went to sleep the moment his head rested on the pillow, nor that he slept so late the next morning that Dorette said—

"Master Kaspar must go to bed earlier tonight, or he will not be up until dinner-time to-morrow."

Perhaps Kaspar would be glad to have a long night, but that you shall hear about in the next chapter.





## CHAPTER IX.

KASPAR'S ADVENTURE WITH THE FOURTH WHITE PIGEON.
THE OPENING OF THE PALACE, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

LL day long Kaspar could think of nothing but his adventure of the previous evening, and he had told it over to Linda at least half-a-dozen times, and Linda had listened as though she had never heard it before.

"Do you think that you could like a Squirrel Prince with only one ear, Linda?" asked Kaspar, in conclusion.

Then Linda looked grave for a while before she answered, for it was a question that required some consideration.

"I think I like my old doll with only one arm and part of its hair burnt off better than any of the others, better even than the new wax one with the pink flounces on its dress."

- "Ah!" said Kaspar, also considering; "but you are only a little girl, Linda. And then the doll once had two arms."
  - "The Prince had once two ears."
- "Yes, but the Princess did not know him then."

Then the two children were grave, for Linda's logic could not carry her over this difficulty.

At last she said-

- "Kaspar, you do not know what may happen; you had better wait and see. Such strange things take place in Fairyland. Who would ever think that an Ancient Grofulus could become as small as a lizard, and then grow large again?"
- "It is good advice," returned Kaspar, "I will try and wait patiently. But, Linda, the Squirrel Prince is such a brave fellow, that I should not like him to feel that the Princess despised him."
- "There is no fear," replied Linda; "the fairies will make it all turn out right."
- "The last night," sighed Kaspar; "are you not sorry, Linda?"
  - "Yes; only I want the end to come, and

to know if every one is happy, and whether the Stone Warriors will go to the wedding."

"Dear me! I had not thought of that. Of course there will be a wedding—that is, if——" But here he stopped himself, for he determined to think as little about the Prince's ear as possible.

Kaspar was not sorry to go to bed an hour earlier than usual, for he thought the longest night would not be too long for such sights as he had to see. So he went contentedly enough, and he really did not believe that he went to sleep at all, for in about a minute, so it seemed to him, the window flew open, and a beautiful golden light, like to summer sunshine, burst into the room, and the air felt so deliciously warm, that Kaspar knew that fairy winter had gone, and that fairy summer had come in all its glory. For changes are very sudden in Fairyland.

The Fourth White Pigeon hopped upon the bed; the most beautiful Pigeon of all, though perhaps a little greedy sometimes so soft, so sleek, with such large dark eyes.

"You handsome bird," said Kaspar, caressing it."

"Don't flatter me," replied the White Pigeon; "I am vain enough already. Put on your clothes. I have brought a new suit to-night."

"They must have very good tailors in Fairyland," said Kaspar, admiringly. Yes, what a suit!—white velvet, all besprinkled with pearls and diamonds and gold embroidery; and a sword in a golden scabbard, inlaid with precious stones!

"I shall look like a prince myself," remarked Kaspar. "I don't believe kings wear better clothes than these."

"Remember, there is to be a wedding," said the White Pigeon.

"Oh! there *really* is, is there? And what will the Spinning Princess think of——" He was going to say "the Prince's ears," but he stopped himself. No, he would ask no questions; he would wait, as Linda had advised him to do.

"Summer again, and it was winter only last night!" he observed to the Pigeon, as they flew slowly through the great avenue towards the Palace.

Summer indeed, for all the leaves were out,

and all the branches of the trees garlanded with flowers that only grow in summer-time.

"Ah!" replied the White Pigeon, "that is the advantage of living in Fairyland; one can have summer or winter, just as it suits one's fancy."

Among the branches of the trees were birds of every clime and plumage—parrots, macaws, cockatoos, blue jays, birds of paradise, golden eagles, humming-birds, canaries, and, in fact, every bird that has ever been heard of, to say nothing of wonderful butterflies of all sizes and colours.

"Out of the Museum," explained the White Pigeon; "there is a general holiday to-night."

Kaspar was glad to hear of it; it must be quite a pleasant change, after having been shut up in glass cases for so long.

They passed out of the avenue into the great square, and there, to Kaspar's amazement, were all the animals he had seen in the Museum, promenading to the sounds of military music. There was the Lion, with a new crown upon his head; the Tigers, Leopards, Panthers—he recognised them all. These, however, formed a select group, and

the White Pigeon confidentially informed Kaspar that those Beasts who had accompanied the expedition "were going in to supper."

"To the wedding supper," he added, as Kaspar did not seem to understand.

As Kaspar and the White Pigeon flew past, the select Beasts shouted, "Hurrah! hurrah!" in which the promiscuous Beasts instinctively joined.

And Kaspar waved his cap, and shouted, "Hurrah! hurrah!" in answer.

His spirits were rising, and he began to have greater faith in Linda's prophecies.

How well everything looked. The soldiers that formed a guard of honour round the Palace had each a large white satin rosette and a sprig of orange blossom on his breast. And where could so many soldiers come from? and where were the new silken banners made in such a short time? and who put up the triumphal arches? and where did all the flowers grow? for it seemed to Kaspar as if all the gardens in the world must have been stripped to supply so many.

Ah! it was very lovely with the fairy sun

shining down upon the fountains, and on the terraces, and through the acacia trees. And the Goldfishes popped up their heads as Kaspar passed, and said—

"We shall feast to-night upon wedding cake."

They were greedy fishes still, and thought only of eating.

But Kaspar took no notice of them. He flew along under the trees to the orangery that the Squirrel Prince had made his temporary Palace.

"But the Great Palace will be his when he has married the Spinning Princess," observed the White Pigeon.

The Squirrel Prince had not finished his toilet, so Kaspar and the White Pigeon waited in the hall amongst the orange and pomegranate trees, and Kaspar already noticed how much more flourishing everything looked. The Lord Chancellor had lost his careworn appearance, and his cash-boxes, which had been brightened up, were quite ornamental; indeed, he had acquired the art of moving his tail quite jauntily with them, and did not seem in the least incommoded by them now.

Riches make such a difference!

The Lord High Admiral, too, was quite sprightly. The anchor which he had appeared a little ashamed of before, inasmuch as it reminded him of two barges and a dismasted man-of-war, he now bore proudly, since he knew that a gallant fleet, well manned and well provisioned, lay in the river, with flags flying, and guns ready to fire a salute in answer to the artillery that should ere long proclaim the triumph of the Squirrel Prince.

The Commander-in-Chief had returned to court, and had brought with him aides-decamp, generals, colonels, and officers innumerable. He was joking pleasantly with the Lord Chamberlain and the Lords-in-waiting generally, also with the Stone Warriors, who had thrown aside their mediæval armour, and had bought lavender kid gloves for the occasion—probably the first they had ever worn.

In fact, prosperity seemed to sit very lightly and comfortably upon every one. It was, Kaspar supposed, very easy to bear.

"So goes it in the world," whispered the White Pigeon.

Kaspar made no answer; he was too much absorbed in watching for the appearance of the Squirrel Prince, who was putting on his robes of state.

At length the door leading to his apartments opened, and forth issued the Squirrel Prince, in all the magnificence of silver brocade and cloth of gold.

As far as his dress was concerned, he was perfection; but alas! he had only one ear and a large patch upon his forehead.

Could he have looked at himself in a mirror? Kaspar thought he must have done so, as he seemed somewhat low-spirited.

"I am not worthy of her," he said in a nervous whisper to Kaspar; "tell me, O true knight! will she despise me?"

Kaspar did not know what to answer, for he felt quite as doubtful as the Squirrel Prince did; but, remembering what Linda had said to him, he replied—

"We must hope for the best. No one knows what may happen."

Of course the Squirrel Prince did not know what Kaspar and Linda had been talking about, but he seized Kaspar's hand, and said—

"Thanks, thanks, good youth; the smallest encouragement is acceptable."

So Kaspar had no doubt but that he felt extremely ugly.

Meanwhile the procession was being formed outside. The troops made a grand show; hussars, artillery, lancers, every kind of soldier that you can mention, and all in new uniforms. As for the flags belonging to each regiment, they must have been emblazoned in Fairyland, for nowhere else could such flaming letters have been wrought.

The Courtiers were resplendent; evidently they had not been idle by the Sea of Emeralds and the Valley of Sapphires, for their wives, whose trains were borne by dormice, had coronets of sparkling gems of blue and green, and it is to be presumed that they were real. At any rate, Kaspar could not help guessing where they came from.

A close chariot of scarlet, gilded magnificently, and drawn by eight Angora goats, waited for the Squirrel Prince. This was followed by one drawn by four goats, into which Kaspar stepped, whilst the White Pigeon sat upon the box. Other carriages

followed for the court dignitaries and the Stone Warriors; the latter had an exceedingly handsome one all to themselves.

Everything was ready for starting.

What a crowd there was, and what a strange one! Besides the Squirrel population, all Elfinland was abroad, also Trolls, Wooddemons, Water-sprites, Dwarfs, and Bergfolk. Not a tree, but some queer goblin face looked down from it; not a rose, or lily, or flower of any kind, but held some gossamer-looking fay with shining wings, waving a glittering wand, and adding its tiny voice to the chorus that swelled louder and louder as the train moved on, cheer upon cheer drowning the music of the court musicians, and the military bands that thundered forth the national air of Squirrel-land.

And so they journeyed on.

And what was the Spinning Princess thinking of as she wove her golden web? Had she any idea that the time of her deliverance was nigh?

Did the Statues weeping in the Hall of Music know that soon their weeping would be changed to smiles of joy?

The Princess, in her flowing white robe, sat spinning, spinning. Her golden wheel went round with a soft musical whirr; her golden hair fell like a veil of glory round her, and her fingers twisted the golden thread into her work.

Spinning, spinning, spinning. Would the web ever be complete?—the web that was one long story of her love for the Earth-born Prince?

Ah! there was a knot in it. The sorrowful thread had been broken, and though she had joined it very neatly, yet it had sent a stitch wrong in the pattern, and every one could tell that there had been a joining. Yet from that joining a new element crept into it, and that element was hope. She scarcely knew what sort of hope, or what she hoped for, but somehow it seemed as if a brighter ending were coming to her shining work than she had anticipated.

She sat listening to the strains of music floating from the Music Hall, and ever, as she listened, she thought of the Earth-born Prince, and it seemed as though a voice whispered through the music, "I come; I come."

And then the Princess felt happy for a moment, and then again she sighed, for she feared that it was a false voice deceiving her.

Yet still the music played on, sometimes sad, sometimes gay; now it grew more stately, and at length it burst into the glorious wedding march that the great German musician knew could only belong to a fair Midsummer Night's Dream. So clear, so joyous, so majestic! And the Spinning Princess dropped her golden thread, and sat with her blue eyes open wide, listening, listening.

Hark! it was answered from without. Surely musicians in the midsummer daylight were echoing back the strain.

And softer grew the music from the hall, and louder, deeper came the music from without in rich clear chords, mingling with the roar of many voices shouting joyfully—a sea of living song, flowing in waves of sound that half-drowned the notes of the sweet-toned instruments.

It reminded the Princess of the day that she had left her river-home, and had wandered through the crowd to see the Earthborn Prince. Hush! She must listen, though it pierced her heart. She must listen and listen, though she should weep her life away. For so it happens sometimes to the Water-sprites.

And the Spinning Princess covered her face with her hands and wept.

In the meantime the chariot of the Prince had paused before the principal entrance to the Palace.

The soldiers kept back the crowd that pressed around. The Squirrel Prince alighted. He signed to Kaspar, who in a moment stood at his side.

"Only the two," said the White Pigeon; "only the two must enter the Palace till the Spinning Princess is found."

The Silver Key had been borne upon a satin cushion in a triumphal car that followed Kaspar's chariot, and now the White Pigeon desired it might be given into Kaspar's hands, who, carrying it up the flight of steps, knelt down before the Squirrel Prince and presented it to him.

The Squirrel Prince received it a little anxiously, for it might not, after all, fit the lock.

However, he held it up in the sight of the multitude, and kissed it reverently.

Whereat a great shout rose up from Soldiers, Fairies, Trolls, Berg-folk, Dwarfs, Birds, and Beasts.

Then he fitted it into the lock, and lo! it fitted admirably: he turned it, and it turned as easily as the key of a jewel-case.

And, as he turned it, a great change stole over him; his Squirrel face appeared to be fading away, and the patch melted into a beautiful white forehead. Another turn—the door was opening, his tail dropped off, and must have been magically whisked away, for Kaspar never knew what became of it. Another turn—the door was open wide. Squirrel Prince had suddenly grown tall, and none would know him for a Squirrel now; his figure was like a man's, and his face, if the multitude could have seen it, like to that of the handsomest prince that ever lived.

Wide open was the door, and the Squirrel Prince and Kaspar entered in. Then it closed again, and the Squirrel Prince and Kaspar trod the wide entrance hall. Not a Squirrel Prince now, but a Prince beautiful

as the morning, with large deep eyes full of poetry and tenderness, and a smile that would win the hearts of all who chanced to see him.

"As handsome as the Spinning Princess," thought Kaspar to himself, as he followed on through the Palace, until they came to a door that no one had ever seen there before, and which flew open as Kaspar and the Prince advanced, and showed a winding staircase leading down below.

"To the Princess' apartments," said Kaspar reverently, for the Prince had become of much more importance in his eyes since the transformation had taken place.

Kaspar had returned to his proper size, so that he now looked like a page following the Prince. And on, on they went through the Hall of Music, through which still rang in softest, sweetest tones the joyful wedding march.

The weeping Statues unveiled their faces at the footsteps, and when they saw the handsome Prince they smiled at one another, for they knew their captivity was at an end.

They would have lifted up their voices in a jubilant chorus, but Kaspar put his finger on his lips, and the Prince, as one in a dream, passed on to the chamber of the Spinning Princess.

There she sat—not spinning, spinning, for her work was over; her head was bowed down upon the golden wheel, and her golden tresses fell over her neck and shoulders far down till they swept the ground.

She was still weeping, and heard not the step of the handsome Prince.

Kaspar stood back a little, but the Prince advanced. He drew near to the Spinning Princess, but she stirred not; he stooped over her, but still she continued weeping; he bent lower down, and, gently taking one of her hands, he kissed it. And then the Spinning Princess looked up.

So like the Earth-born Prince that she had loved! Could it be he?

She passed her hand across her star-like eyes, and then looked up again, and he still was there. She was not dreaming.

"How long I have waited for you," she said; "but you have come at last."

When the Prince saw her beautiful face, he knew that what Kaspar had said of her was

all true, and that there was not so lovely a Princess in all the world.

"And you will be my Queen," said the Prince, "and we shall live for ever and ever in the fairest country that ever was seen."

And the Princess gave him her hand, and the Prince led her up the winding staircase into the great hall, and from thence to the state apartments, and out on to the balcony over the principal entrance, to the very spot where she had first beheld her Earth-born Prince.

And there he put a crown upon her head all glittering with diamonds, and the crowd shouted for joy when the Prince presented her to his people, saying—

"This is my Queen and yours."

And louder and louder the people cried, "Viva!" and the cannon pealed, and the bands played, and the fairy sun shone out with rays so bright that the very air itself seemed almost turned to gold.

And from the river boomed forth in answer the guns from the men-of-war. And the river shone in the sunlight, and the white sails of the ships and the gay streamers were a sight to see.

And the old Water-uncle of the Spinning Princess lifted his great head from the river, and his hoary beard floated on the water like seaweed.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

And you may be sure that there were plenty of people to answer—

"The Silver Key is found, the Palace is unlocked, and this is the Spinning Princess' wedding day."

Then down dived the Water-uncle, and he told it to her mother, and to her sisters, and to every one. And there was a great stir throughout the River-kingdom, especially as it was found that a good many Water-sprites had slipped away to see all that was going on in the old city; whereat the Water-uncle was very angry. But the Mother said—

"Never mind; they will tell us all about it when they come home at night."

And whilst they were talking the crowd in the great square was shouting lustily, and the music playing, and the flags flying, and the Spinning Princess was looking as happy as it is possible for any one to look.

Kaspar gazed round for the Squirrel Courtiers, but they had vanished, and in their place was a noble train of knights and ladies. Neither were the bright-eyed Dormice to be seen, but dainty little pages in velvet tunics and slashed sleeves bore the trains of the maids-of-honour and the other ladies of the court. The Stone Warriors appeared much pleased to find themselves in such good company, and the select Beasts marched in to the grand banquet as much at their ease as any one.

It might possibly look rather odd to see the Lion, and Tiger, and Leopards, to say nothing of the Rhinoceros, and Camelopard, and other Beasts, sitting down at table; but when the Spinning Princess heard what good service they had done, she smiled graciously upon them, and drank their health out of a crystal goblet.

As for Kaspar, she held out her hand for him to kiss as she had done before, and Kaspar kissed it more than once, for he knew that it was for the last time. "It has all ended well so far," he said to the White Pigeon, as they were flying homewards; "will it go on well from this time?"

"The Prince and Princess will be happy for ever and ever," answered the White Pigeon.

And these were the last words that Kaspar ever heard any of the Pigeons speak.

"I never heard anything so beautiful, Kaspar," said Linda, when she had heard all that Kaspar had to tell her. "You see it ended all right, and the Squirrel Prince became a real Prince after all."

"Yes."

"But not the Earth-born Prince; only a Prince just like him. That is strange. Do you think the Princess will ever find out that he is not the same?"

"I don't know," said Kaspar; "I did not think of it."

"Not that it will matter if she does," continued Linda, after a little consideration, "for you know the White Pigeon said that they would be happy for ever and ever and ever. So that she will like him quite as well as she

would have liked the Earth-born Prince. Oh, Kaspar! I am so sorry that it is all over."

"So am I," answered Kaspar, with a sigh.

"But perhaps it might come over again next Christmas."

Kaspar shook his head.

"Or something just a little, a very little, like it."

"I am afraid not. We shall be a year older then, and the Pigeons will not think that we shall care to know about Fairyland as we grow older and wiser."

"I shall never be wise enough not to care for fairy tales," said Linda very decidedly.

"One does not know," replied Kaspar. "I can't imagine it myself, and yet Marie and Thekla don't care for them."

Linda's countenance fell.

"I wish we could always be no older than we are now, Kaspar.

But Kaspar did not quite wish that.

"No, I should not like that. I should like to be a man, Linda, and to know everything that is to be known in the world."

"That you will never do if you go on

dreaming as you do now," observed Thekla, who had overheard the last sentence. "It is well it is holiday time, for you are very idle, Kaspar."

"No, he is not," said Linda, flashing up in defence of her brother: he has been--"

But Kaspar put his finger on Linda's lips, and so she said no more, and Thekla soon went out of the nursery.

Kaspar and Linda ran to the window, and looked out at the Pigeons, who were all sitting on the roof opposite, sunning themselves in the bright warm sun that shone pleasantly, but not too brightly to melt away the snow that was lying over the garden, and hanging silver tassels over the larches, and crowning with frosted crowns the pines, and the dome of the University Church.

"Have you any cakes left, Linda?"

" Plenty."

Then the children opened the window, and spread out an excellent meal of carraway cake, marchpane, sweet biscuits, and chocolate bonbons for the Seven Wonderful Pigeons. or certainly, if any Pigeons ever deserved to be well fed, these seven decidedly merited it.

Kaspar looked at them earnestly—the White ones, the Dove-coloured, the Grey, and the Mottled one.

"Thank you, good Pigeons," he said, "for the pleasant hours you have given me. Whenever you come to this window you shall always have a welcome, and Linda and I will save a piece of cake for you whenever we have any.

The Pigeons, however, made no answer, but finished their repast in silence. And then they flew away again.

Now if any little girls or boys wish to see these Seven Wonderful Pigeons, they have nothing to do but to cross the Channel, take a steamer up the Rhine as far as Mainz, and then turn off to Frankfurt, and journey on until they arrive at Würzburg.

Then, if they go into Distrikt III., and look at all the houses, they may perhaps find one with a courtyard, and an old hermit seated in a little chapel; and also find the ducks, the fowls, Gibby, and the White Poodle exactly as I have described them. Above all, they will here see the Seven Wonderful Pigeons—that is, if they are living still.

And if they are inclined to travel farther, until they reach a Capital rich in all the treasures of art, they may perchance there meet with the Earth-born Prince who visited the grand old Palace at Würzburg, and won the love of the beautiful Spinning Princess.



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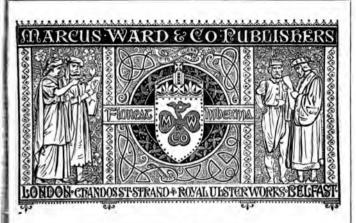
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